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Dramatic Criticism

By

J. T. Grein



London

John Long

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(The above articles have all appeared in "La Revue d'Art Dramatique", "The Sunday special" or "To-Morrow.")

DRAMATIC CRITICISM

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TO
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR STRUGGLE FOR DRAMATIC
INDEPENDENCE AND WITH GRATEFUL
AFFECTION.



LA DECADENCE DU THEATRE ANGLAIS

(1897)

Dans mon dernier article j'ai parlé de l'invasion du théâtre anglais par le genre café-concert, et insisté sur ce fait que — en dehors de quelques auteurs en renom — la majorité des hommes de lettres abandonne la rampe pour cultiver le roman et le journalisme.

C'était dire que le théâtre anglais est en plein déclin, après une renaissance fort courte.

En 1889 il y eut en effet des indices qui firent croire un instant que le répertoire allait subir un heureux changement. On donna la première pièce analytique de Pinero (*The Profligate*) ; Ibsen fit son apparition parmi les ovations des jeunes et les huées de la vieille garde ; les bouffonneries salées (et souvent malpropres) du boulevard parisien durent finalement faire place à des pièces indigènes ; bref, le petit monde du théâtre déploya une activité belliqueuse de forteresse en mobilisation !

Le beau rêve, hélas ! ne dura pas. „Qui trop embrasse, mal étreint.” On s'était imaginé que le public était converti, qu'il acceptait des pièces à thèse, et on l'en accabla jusqu'à ce qu'il en fût rassasié et criât grâce. Et lorsque enfin M. John Hare, le directeur archi-conservateur du Garrick-théâtre, conquis par la nouvelle école, représenta *Mrs. Lessingham*, de George Fleming, un de ces succès d'estime qui sont pis que des foudres éclatants, il donna ainsi le coup de grâce au „mouvement nouveau.”

D'ailleurs, la critique vieux jeu avait, dès le commencement, fait une guerre acharnée à la pièce à thèse, à Ibsen, au théâtre indépendant, ne parlait que de „turpitudes, d'immoralité et d'indécences”. La virulence d'un tel langage parvint à effrayer le public, qui délaissa alors le théâtre en faveur du music-hall. La critique des jeunes, les Archer, les Shaw, les Walkley et autres combattirent vaillamment pour leur cause ; mais, que pouvaient-

ils contre les bombes meurtrières du *Daily Telegraph* et les flèches empoisonnées du 'parti pris du *Standard*? Ce n'est pas le critique qui gouverne le public, mais le tirage du journal ; et, malheureusement, la nouvelle école était en minorité.

Or, dès que les jeunes furent mis en déroute, le théâtre ne gagna plus d'argent, ce pendant que le music-hall faisait bonne chère.

Cet état de chose ne pouvait continuer, et quelques directeurs durent, pour éviter la ruine, prendre le parti d'imiter l'exemple donné par la *Gaiety*, et montèrent des spectacles composés de tous les éléments du café-concert. Ce fut une réussite. A un moment donné, pas moins de huit théâtres avaient au programme des „comédies musicales”, pour la plupart un mélange navrant de paroles bébêtes ou inconvenantes, de petite musique fréquemment empruntée à droite et à gauche, et d'un étalage de charmes féminins qui indique suffisamment quelle était la portée du spectacle, car le public anglais, très prude quand il s'agit de questions sérieuses, tolère et applaudit les allusions douteuses et les sous-entendus équivoques, pourvu qu'ils soient voilés d'un masque comique. Et ces mêmes critiques, qui avaient éreinté Ibsen et les siens qui osaient traiter dans leurs drames de la question sexuelle, ont acclamé ces comédies musicales où les mères n'hésitent point à conduire leurs filles et se livrent à des convulsions de rire, qui ont pour but de dissimuler une légitime rougeur!...

Maintenant le genre bouffon a atteint son apogée, comme jadis l'Empire Romain croulait écrasé du poids d'une gloire trop lourde.

Les directeurs qui exploitaient la comédie musicale ont commis la même erreur que les jeunes ont commise avant eux : le public ne veut plus des balivernes pour lesquelles on demandait son argent, et voilà les comédies musicales aux abois.

En même temps, les théâtres sérieux ont puisé leur répertoire dans le genre romantique ; ils ont adapté des romans, genre Weyman et Hope, qui ont été fort appréciés du public, grâce à leur forme tapageuse, et à grand spectacle. On a aussi repris de vieilles pièces de Robertson et cherché des mélodrames en

France et en Amérique, et comme la source des auteurs indigènes tarissait, on s'est souvenu tout à coup d'un grand auteur français d'il y a vingt-cinq ans, dont la fécondité était sans bornes, Alexandre Dumas père. Et c'est ainsi, malgré les proclamations bruyantes des bons critiques qui prétendirent que l'Angleterre n'avait que faire des auteurs étrangers, que le répertoire français s'est installé en maître, en ce pays où l'auteur le plus populaire aujourd'hui est incontestablement le grand Dumas.

Et ce ne sont point les directeurs qui l'ont découvert. Les directeurs se garderaient bien de découvrir quoi que ce soit ; ils savent plus ou moins ce qui se passe dans les petits théâtres du boulevard ; mais les Brioux, les de Curel, les Hervieu, les Lavedan et les Donnay, aussi bien que les Hauptmann, les Halbe, les Hartleben d'Allemagne, les Schnitzler d'Autriche, leur sont totalement inconnus, à moins que l'*Era* — le journal théâtral — ne les en entretienne, ou qu'un pauvre diable d'enthousiaste leur en apporte quelque traduction... qu'ils ne trouvent pas le temps de lire !

Les directeurs anglais vivent au jour le jour ; seul, M. Alexander de Saint-James a parfois des pièces sur le chantier, prêtes à combler une lacune ; les autres n'ont ni idées arrêtées, ni troupes organisées, ni conseillers intimes qui pourraient les tenir au courant de la littérature étrangère et lire pour eux les œuvres originales et intéressantes.

Le directeur, qui est trop souvent l'acteur principal de son théâtre, est trop affairé pour étudier l'art ; il étudie son rôle, sa caisse et surtout ses relations avec le public, c'est-à-dire la réclame ; il promet mille choses et n'en retient guère, M. Beerbohm Tree en tête. Il a la déplorable habitude d'annoncer monts et merveilles dans les entrefilets qu'il envoie aux courriéristes, et a une foi absolue en la pièce qu'il choisit ; et, quand, à la première, il est avéré que cette pièce n'est qu'un fiasco, ou que brusquement la recette baisse, il ne se trouve rien pour renouveler le programme.

Et voilà pourquoi Dumas a été ressuscité. M. Grundy, son très habile adaptateur, a introduit *Un mariage sous Louis XV*,

au Haymarket, à un moment où les directeurs étaient en détresse autour des débris d'une pièce qu'ils avaient essayé de monter et à laquelle ils avaient dû renoncer. Une autre fois, M. Grundy fut l'ange sauveur de M. Tree en lui donnant *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*, quand celui-ci, au milieu du jubilé, ne savait que faire après la débâcle de *The Seats of the Mighty*, dont j'ai déjà parlé.

En résumé, voici où nous en sommes : les producteurs indigènes presque nuls ; la plupart de nos grands théâtres alimentés par les maîtres français et les disparus ; les petites scènes envahies par des bouffonneries douteuses ou les insanités de la „Comédie musicale” et les larmes de crocodiles du mélodrame. C'est — force nous est de le reconnaître — l'apothéose honteuse et dégradante du système commercial.

L'EDUCATION DE L'ACTEUR.

Puisque la saison théâtrale n'est pas commencée, parlons un peu des acteurs.

S'il y a quelque malice, il n'y a nulle exagération à dire qu'une grande partie de nos acteurs ne sont entrés au théâtre qu'après avoir essayé en vain d'autres métiers, et n'apportent à la scène d'autre qualité qu'une jolie figure et un enthousiasme, provenant d'une certaine épidémie qui règne actuellement et que l'on pourrait baptiser du nom de *theatromania acuta*.

En effet la grande majorité des acteurs anglais sont dénués de talent, voire même d'intelligence ; en revanche ils nous exhibent une tenue et des manières recherchées auxquelles on n'était pas habitué autrefois. C'est qu'ils sortent de la classe bourgeoise aisée ou de la meilleure aristocratie du pays.

Une ambition colossale doublée d'une absolue confiance en soi anime toute cette jeunesse d'une ardeur sacrée. Parfait, si cette ambition et cette confiance étaient renforcées par un fonds d'éducation solide, et surtout par des études assidues, mais il n'en est rien.

L'acteur anglais ne travaille qu'à la scène. A ses heures de loisir il a autre chose à faire que de se perfectionner dans l'art de dire et d'étudier les beautés des rôles créés par les maîtres de la littérature anglaise, française et allemande.

Plus sportsman que comédien, il vit entre le club et les *five o'clock* des petites amies et des gens du *high life* par lesquels ils sont très recherchés et, disons le mot „gâtés". Ces messieurs ont aussi leurs petites affaires „à côté", affaires commerciales et financières bien autrement intéressantes, paraît-il, que les cailloux de Démosthène et l'étude de l'humanité.

J'admets que dans cet état de choses, les circonstances ont leur part de responsabilité.

Les acteurs anglais, à moins d'avoir fait un apprentissage du métier dans les troupes de province — vie laborieuse et roturière, mais école insuffisante parce que les représentations y sont trop lestement préparées — sont condamnés à jouer interminablement la même pièce. Les théâtres de Londres n'ont ni répertoire proprement dit ni troupe, et leur direction, si elle a la bonne fortune de tenir entre les mains des étoiles tels que sir Henry Irving, M. Tree, M. Alexander et tant d'autres, néglige l'éducation des jeunes recrues auxquelles elle ne demande que de tourner modestement autour des astres sans les éclipser.

Voilà pourquoi l'artiste anglais n'est jamais sûr du lendemain. Engagé pour la saison, c'est-à-dire pour la durée d'une pièce, il est rare qu'il se retrouve en contact avec les mêmes collègues (cela peut arriver cependant, au Lyceum par exemple où les engagements de quelques pensionnaires durent pendant une période prolongée), il ne peut profiter des avantages précieux de l'„ensemble”, et le fait de jouer la même pièce pendant des mois et des mois l'empêche forcément de progresser.

Je sais bien que le mal n'est point propre à Londres. Paris en souffre également, mais il y a une différence. Là les diplômés ont du moins la chance de trouver refuge à l'Odéon ou à la Comédie, ou ont, de même que les acteurs qui n'ont point passé par le Conservatoire, la ressource des théâtres d'à côté, et surtout des théâtres permanents de la province, pour atteindre cette souplesse et ce don de l'ensemble qui sont une partie essentielle de l'éducation artistique. Mais ici cette éducation est complètement négligée. Il y a bien quelques écoles théâtrales, mais elles ne jouissent d'aucune autorité, et leur système est déplorablement défectueux. Nous avons aussi quelques artistes en renom qui donnent des leçons de diction, mais ceci est plutôt du dilettantisme que de l'enseignement pratique.

En somme l'acteur de l'avenir n'a que le choix entre les troupes ambulantes de province ou le début comme figurant dans les théâtres de Londres, où il espère monter petit à petit et péniblement à l'échelle de la gloire.

La création d'un Conservatoire s'impose donc. Mais, quelque étrange que cela paraisse, aussitôt que ce lièvre est soulevé, le

public s'entend pour lui envoyer une bonne balle dans la tête, et les projets sont abandonnés sous le prétexte que le Conservatoire de Paris produit des acteurs frappés de la même estampille, en ce qu'ils ont une manière unique — celle des professeurs — qui, outre qu'elle détruit en eux toute fantaisie et tout imprévu, leur donne une diction banale et monotone.

Rien n'est plus faux. En admettant que les élèves du Conservatoire en sortent, exhibant „la marque de fabrique” d'un système, cela ne vaut-il pas mieux que s'ils n'avaient ni base élémentaire, ni éducation, bref, pas de système du tout ?

Car tel est le cas, et en ma qualité d'ancien directeur d'une entreprise purement artistique, le *Théâtre Indépendant*, j'ose dire que mon jugement est le fruit de la pratique et non d'une théorie oiseuse.

J'ai eu affaire avec toute sorte d'acteurs ; à des artistes arrivés (hommes et femmes) qui désiraient faire de l'art et non du métier (c'est pour cela que chez moi les rôles importants avaient des cachets minimes) ; à des débutants cherchant le succès avec les rôles d'Ibsen et le théâtre réaliste ; à des tout jeunes — des écoliers à vrai dire — devant lesquels toutes les portes se fermaient à l'exception de celle de l'*Indépendant* ; eh bien, presque tous, même les plus connus, étaient d'une incroyable lenteur à apprendre, à saisir, à approfondir leurs rôles. Nous avions des répétitions sans nombre, vingt, vingt-cinq, trente ; mais pendant les premières semaines les artistes étaient trop occupés à trouver leur „position” pour pouvoir graver leurs rôles dans leur mémoire, ils ne les savaient que lorsque la répétition générale leur battait les flancs ; car presque tous avaient été accoutumés à jouer dans des pièces factices où l'action a plus de part que la parole, ou dans des pièces classiques où la tradition régnait suprême. Ce qui leur manquait, en un mot, c'était moins le talent et la bonne volonté que l'intuition artistique dont sont doués au berceau quelques rares privilégiés, mais dont la plupart sont totalement dépourvus et auxquels aucune éducation n'a suppléé.

Une autre commune erreur est de proclamer qu'un acteur naît un acteur et ne peut être formé avec l'enseignement. Ce n'est

guère admissible que pour les races latines dont le tempérament est essentiellement dramatique. Mais pour ce qui concerne les peuples germaniques qui ont le sang plus froid et la fantaisie plus lente, je parle surtout des Allemands du Nord, des Hollandais, et avant tout des Anglais, je suis d'avis que le théâtre doit être étudié de fond en comble comme une science, parce que le don histrionique ne leur est pas inné, je pourrais même — à titre d'exception — tirer au pair des acteurs anglais si je ne craignais de fatiguer le lecteur et... d'exciter des jalousies. Mais ces exceptions ne font que confirmer mon dire; je pourrais ajouter comme dernière preuve que la scène anglaise ne possède de nos jours qu'un tragédien, Sir Henry Irving, et ne possède aucune tragédienne. Mais en voilà assez sur un fait indiscutable et qui s'impose.

Le théâtre anglais restera toujours notoirement inférieur à celui d'outre-Manche tant que l'éducation des acteurs en restera négligée, et que les directeurs ne consentiront point à se préoccuper moins de basses spéculations commerciales.

L'ACTEUR-DIRECTEUR.

Comme, en Angleterre, l'Etat — ce bon dieu des Beaux-Arts — s'obstine à refuser des subventions au théâtre, celui-ci balance entre les soins de l'ange-gardien et les artifices du diable. Et il y a ceci de curieux : l'ange et le diable ne font qu'un. C'est le personnage important de l'acteur-directeur.

L'acteur-directeur — tels que sir Henry Irving, M. Beerbohm Tree, M. George Alexander, M. Forbes Robertson, M. Cyril Maude, en un mot la majorité de nos princes du théâtre, est en général un homme qui a de la surface. Il a fait son apprentissage d'acteur, en province d'abord, ensuite à Londres où un jour par droit de conquête ou grâce à un heureux hasard il devient célèbre, révélé miraculeusement par une création nouvelle.

Le succès en Angleterre — comme un peu partout d'ailleurs — ouvre à deux battants les portes les mieux closes. L'acteur arrivé au sommet de la gloire y est maintenu par le public ; on court après lui, on se l'arrache — il est recherché comme une grande marque sur la carte des vins : les moins connues sont peut-être les meilleures, mais on ne les exige pas. Le public dit de son idole comme le Hongrois de son Tokayer : „*Nullum vinum nisi Hungaricum.*” Il lui faut monsieur un Tel parce que Monsieur un Tel est une étoile.

Or, dès que „le jour de gloire est arrivé” l'acteur fait tout de suite valoir ses prétentions. Son cachet est doublé, triplé, voire même décuplé, et comme la soif de l'ambition est inextinguible, l'acteur, devenu célèbre, se lasse de briller en second : il ne reconnaît ni autre Dieu, ni autre maître que le public. Il lui faut une maison à lui, des acteurs, un entourage à lui. Il trouve sans difficulté un bailleur de fonds. Les spéculateurs théâtraux sont nombreux dans ce pays : on les trouve aussi bien

parmi les imprimeurs et les *savonniers* que parmi les boursiers et les petits crevés. Car le théâtre est un aimant de première force, et parmi les gens de fortune qu'il attire il en est qui ne sont poussés que par le plaisir de fréquenter les coulisses, d'autres par l'espoir de faire jouer des pièces qu'ils ont écrites, d'autres enfin, par une „chère amie” désireuse de brûler les planches.

L'argent trouvé, l'affaire est montée sur un grand pied ; on trouve une salle de premier ordre ; on engage à droite et à gauche des acteurs en renom ; on commande des pièces et des adaptations ; on inonde les journaux d'annonces coûteuses ; on soigne son public et la mise en scène ; on est libéral en tout point excepté un... mais l'exception c'est l'affaire du diable dont nous parlerons tout à l'heure.

Il est indiscutable que l'acteur-directeur a fait beaucoup de bien : grâce à lui la situation sociale de l'acteur en général a été beaucoup améliorée. Les théâtres qu'il a construits sont les plus commodes de l'Europe.

Les auteurs qui, autrefois, n'étaient pas du tout rémunérés, ou étaient payés comme des hommes de peine, jouissent maintenant de droits d'auteur considérables, et le talent de plusieurs d'entre eux fût resté sous le boisseau si l'acteur-directeur, ne trouvant pour lui un beau rôle, ne l'avait tiré de l'obscurité.

L'acteur-directeur a aussi mis un terme au pillage des écrivains français. Il est commerçant loyal. Il a horreur des affaires malpropres ou mesquines : il paye et paye bien. Ce n'est pas tout : notre ange gardien veut que tout autour de lui soit à la hauteur de son exaltation — les auteurs ont des revenus princiers ; les loges d'artistes sont propres, confortables, et saines sous l'ancien régime d'étaient des lieux infects) ; les décors sortent des mains de peintres de talent ; les costumes — toujours fournis par la direction et non aux frais de l'artiste — viennent des meilleurs maisons ; les meubles, les bibelots, enfin tout ce qui compose l'appareil théâtral est exquis de goût et de qualité. Si monter une pièce était l'essentiel de l'art du théâtre, la scène anglaise serait la première de l'ancien monde.

Malheureusement, toutes ces grandes qualités de l'acteur-direc-

teur viennent s'échouer sur les rochers aigus de l'égoïsme ou — si vous le préférez — de l'ambition personnelle. Et dans ce naufrage l'ange gardien disparaît pour se métamorphoser en diable.

Sur le portail de tout théâtre dirigé par des acteurs est gravé en lettres invisibles : „l'Etat, c'est moi ; car tel est mon plaisir”, ce qui, traduit et amplifié, signifie : „Je suis le maître de cette maison ; je veux que tout se soumette à ma volonté suprême ; je veux qu'autour de moi tout recule pour me mettre en relief.” Il pourrait ajouter : „Je veux aussi que l'homme qui fait fonctionner la lumière électrique sur la scène en concentre les rayons sur la forme divine de ma personne.”

A ce sujet, je vous conterai une petite anecdote qui fera comprendre mieux que des volumes la diablerie de l'acteur-directeur.

C'était le jour de la répétition générale de — disons *Macbeth*, au théâtre X... Tout marchait à merveille ; on applaudissait ferme, et *Macbeth*, bien qu'un peu nerveux, et grossier envers les figurants, jouait comme un Dieu.

On nageait dans l'espoir d'un triomphe ; mais voilà que tout à coup la machine déclamatoire s'arrête ; un frisson parcourt la salle. *Macbeth*, furieux, a jeté par terre sa belle perruque rousse qu'il piétine avec rage et arrose de larmes, tandis que sa langue comme pétrifiée, se refuse à proférer aucune parole... „Qu'y a-t-il, cher maître?... Etes-vous malade?...” s'écrie-t-on de tous côtés dans la plus grande anxiété. L'autre ne fait entendre que des „hu... hu... hu...” lamentables. On s'inquiète davantage quand *Macbeth*, les bras au ciel, s'élance dans la direction des coulisses. Enfin il retrouve la parole, et, parmi le ruissellement des larmes et les rugissements des sanglots, il explique que le mécanicien, au lieu de diriger les rayons du *magnesium* sur son visage, les a lancés dans un coin désert de la scène!...

Ceci est historique, et des plus significatifs. Toute l'infériorité du système, tout le mal est dévoilé, par ce petit potin de coulisses. Et je pourrais en citer bien d'autres. Chez un tel les acteurs sont avertis par le régisseur qu'ils ne doivent jamais se placer au milieu de la scène quand le „chef” a la parole. Chez un autre les dames sont priées de veiller à ce que leurs toilettes

n'éclipsent pas l'éclat de celle de la directrice. Chez un troisième tous les rôles sont raccourcis pour faire ressortir celui du directeur. Chez tous, l'acteur est non son propre maître mais moralement l'esclave du patron.

Ce n'est pas tout.

Je ne dirai pas grand'chose sur le fait que l'acteur-directeur est devenue un objet de réclame, comme tel produit recommandé. C'est le mal de l'âge, et si nous trouvons ridicule de lire dans les journaux les faits et gestes de messieurs les acteurs et de mesdames les actrices dans la vie privée, la masse savoure ces niaiseries.

Passé encore que l'acteur-directeur fasse des allocutions (souvent fort sottes) au public, le soir de la première, et ose même prononcer à haute voix un jugement avant la critique qu'il a invitée; passe encore qu'il sème lui-même un peu partout sa propre opinion sur des questions de tout genre, et qu'il pose, après un copieux dîner, pour le grand Lama de tous les arts. Ces petites variétés sont plutôt amusantes que nuisibles. Mais de toute la puissance de mes poumons, je proteste contre ce fait que l'acteur-directeur ait l'audace de fouler l'art au pied pour s'élever soi-même sur ses ruines.

Voilà le diable dans toute sa malice.

Et ce diable ne respecte ni la situation, ni la personnalité des autres.

Il imprime sur les affiches son nom en lettres énormes et mirobolantes, et celui de l'auteur en caractères minuscules. Il ordonne aux auteurs vivants de lui écrire les pièces sur mesure, et dégrade les artistes au rang de tailleurs dont le rôle est de le faire valoir. Il s'empare des œuvres des morts qu'il fait taillader, remouler, disséquer, afin de briller seul sur la grande scène vide ou peuplée de mannequins inoffensifs, et n'accueille aucun jeune à moins qu'il ne soit l'humble fournisseur de beaux rôles pour Sa Majesté.

Il me serait facile de continuer ma diatribe, mais à quoi bon?... Le diagnostic est complet.

Et quand on viendra me dire que l'acteur-directeur est un mal nécessaire, qu'il est à plaindre plus qu'à blâmer, puisqu'il est la

victime des circonstances, et doit, pour vivre, être commerçant avant tout, je répondrai d'abord : En quoi lui faut-il vivre sous la double forme d'ange gardien et de diable ? Puis en terminant, je répéterai pour la centième fois que tant que le théâtre anglais sera en proie au commerce, il ne pourra gravir les marches du trône de l'Empire de l'art.



LE PUBLIC

Le public anglais est bon enfant. On pourrait même dire qu'il est enfant, car son éducation artistique est fort élémentaire. Nos habitués du théâtre ne sont aucunement exigeants ; ils se laissent guider par la presse et ensorceler par la beauté de la mise en scène ; ils ont le caractère indécis et par cela même influençable au plus haut degré.

Le public peut être divisé en trois catégories très distinctes : d'abord le spectateur critique qui a beaucoup vu et a lu davantage ; ensuite le spectateur „à la fortune du pot”, c'est-à-dire la grande majorité, qui s'amuse tant bien que mal pour son argent ; enfin le spectateur „digestif” pour qui le théâtre est ce que le pré est aux ruminants.

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Le spectateur expert — ou mieux le spectateur critique — fréquente les stalles comme représentant de la presse, et surtout le parterre et les premiers rangs de la galerie lors des soirs de premières. S'il est journaliste il se tait pendant la représentation, ou se moque de la pièce et des interprètes à voix basse, en attendant d'exprimer à haute voix, dans son journal, ce qu'il pense. S'il appartient au public payant qui a fait la queue aux portes du théâtre pendant plusieurs heures, et souvent dès l'aube, il prononce son verdict bruyamment à la fin du dernier acte, applaudit quand il est satisfait, et conspue sans réserve s'il trouve qu'il n'en a pas pour son argent. Cependant (je parle du public du parterre et de la galerie), il a le cœur tendre ; il aime à encourager les jeunes ; il apprécie les efforts faits pour lui donner des nouveautés nationales ou empruntées à l'étranger, et il s'abstient de manifester, même contre les acteurs, lorsqu'il comprend

que ceux-ci se trompent à force de vouloir trop bien faire.

Mais il fut un temps où souvent il a manifesté contre les „fours” de certains auteurs connus qui travaillent à la „va t’faire fiche”, dans le but unique de gagner de l’argent.

Dans ce temps-là, surtout lorsque le *Playgoers Club* était une société militante dont tous les membres étaient animés du feu sacré, les spectateurs du parterre et des galeries ont fait grand bien. Grâce à eux Ibsen devint possible; grâce à eux aussi M. Pinero put nous présenter *La seconde Tanqueray*, une forte pilule pour les prudes et les faux bonshommes de ce pays; et Mr. Jones plusieurs pièces dans lesquelles certaines mœurs anglaises furent vigoureusement flagellées.

Malheureusement le spectateur critique devient de plus en plus rare. La jeune garde a vieilli; elle est devenue „respectable” et aisée; elle a déserté le parterre et le paradis pour s’en foncer dans les fauteuils. Il y a bien encore quelques enthousiastes qui applaudissent, crient, ou huent tour à tour; mais l’esprit de corps d’antan s’est envolé, et l’opposition d’hier a fait place à la désapprobation silencieuse et froide de l’âge mûr. Il est certain que les recrues venues pour remplir les rangs vides ne possèdent ni le courage ni le feu sacré de leurs prédécesseurs.

C’est pourquoi les premières à Londres n’ont plus aucune importance. Les directeurs agissent à leur guise — bien ou mal. Ils sont sûrs d’avoir de belles premières, car les billets de faveur (qui sont notre claque) envahissent tout et, faute d’organisation, le spectateur critique voit son autorité engloutie dans le brouhaha d’applaudisseurs quand même. Et depuis que l’opposition raisonnable a cessé d’exister, le théâtre anglais est tombé dans le néant de l’insignifiance.

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Le spectateur „à fortune du pot” fait le bonheur et le malheur du théâtre anglais. Il appartient à toutes les classes, mais surtout à celle des industriels, des commerçants et des „bons provinciaux” qui cherchent à tuer dans la grand’ville le mortel ennui de leur existence provinciale.

Ce monde-là est goulu. Il apprécie tout ce qu'il paye et, plus il paye, plus il est content. Il est le partisan fidèle du directeur, tel un ivrogne de son mastroquet. Il n'a aucun savoir, aucune connaissance artistique. S'il lit sur l'affiche que l'on donne ou une comédie ou une bouffonnerie, il rit ; si au contraire, c'est un drame ou mélodrame, il pleure, soupire, fait des grimaces indiquant ses émotions ; et si on lui sert des corsages très décolletés, des mots épicés et des couplets à „double entendre” — comme on dit ici — oh ! alors, il nage dans la joie ! car ceci lui est une occasion de goûter le fruit défendu sans risquer son paradis.

Le spectateur „à la fortune du pot” est indirectement responsable de la rétrogradation du théâtre anglais ; il prend toutes les vessies pour des lanternes ; l'acteur-directeur, environné de l'auréole de la réclame, est son Allah, et le critique influent de sa feuille locale est son prophète. Entre ces deux sortes de spectateurs l'art du théâtre fait banqueroute.

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Il nous reste le spectateur digestif. Pour ce dernier je n'ai point de tendresse. A lui seul il fait plus de tort que le faubourien sans goût, le provincial goulu et le paysan illettré réunis. Il est d'une influence détestable, tandis qu'il devrait être le régénérateur de notre théâtre. Il appartient au meilleur monde. Il est bien élevé. Il a voyagé, lui, vécu, et a par conséquent l'autorité voulue pour faire du théâtre une institution éducatrice, sacrée pour ainsi dire, ainsi qu'il l'a pu voir en France et en Allemagne. Mais, à tous les points de vue, il abuse de sa supériorité. La maison d'art n'est pour lui qu'une espèce de beuglant où, après un bon dîner, l'on va pour l'assouvissement de ses sens. Il est toujours en retard, gêne tout le monde sans même chercher à s'excuser ; il chuchote et fait des observations moqueuses ; il bâilli, à moins qu'il ne dorme et ne ronfle. Quand, pour obéir à ses devoirs sociaux, il est condamné à voir une pièce de valeur, un spectacle classique, il n'admet que les acteurs descendus au clownisme et les actrices désireuses de découvrir leurs charmes. C'est à eux que nous

devons en partie le genre café-concert qui a envahi le théâtre et qui a mis Londres à l'arrière-garde du mouvement dramatique en Europe.

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Le public n'est pas le seul coupable. Dans mes articles précédents, j'ai expliqué en quoi les acteurs, surtout les acteurs-directeurs, sont la cause du déclin du théâtre anglais. En somme le public tout naïf qu'il est (peut-être même en raison de cette naïveté), pourrait être aisément réformé. D'abord, si l'Etat ou — l'Etat faisant défaut — un des Mécènes qui abondent en ce pays, voulait bien prêter ses capitaux à l'art dramatique au lieu de les réserver, comme c'est l'habitude, pour la musique, la peinture et l'art facile (l'opéra bouffe, les pièces à femmes, etc.). Et cette réforme serait vite effectuée si le Mécène voulait créer un théâtre subventionné à l'instar de la Comédie Française, et des théâtres municipaux et princiers de l'Allemagne, de la „Burg” de Vienne, — un théâtre, enfin, où le commerce serait une question soumise à celle de l'art.

Ensuite il faudrait que la critique soit, je ne dirai pas moins partielle, mais plus libérale envers les modernes, et plus sévère pour la médiocrité nationale.

Les directeurs et les acteurs ont souvent proclamé — et ils ont peut-être raison — que la critique de la presse a peu de réelle influence sur le public ; qu'une pièce ne dépend guère de l'opinion des journaux, mais surtout de cette réclame sourde et presque insaisissable qui émane du public même, semant son opinion parmi le cercle de ses connaissances. Cependant, même en admettant ceci, il est indiscutable que les journaux, avec leur circulation énorme, sont très consultés et sont pour ainsi dire les guides de leurs lecteurs.

Or, les journaux pleins de bonne volonté et d'indulgence ont dans le pays le défaut de tous les parents gâteux envers leurs enfants : nos critiques savent bien que le drame anglais est un frêle bébé, un nourisson maladif et mal allaité, et par crainte de mettre en danger les jours de l'enfant, ils le dorlo-

tent, le choient sans trop savoir s'ils lui font plus de bien que de mal.

Ils mettent tout ce qui est anglais sur un piédestal. Ils proclament que les mélodrames de l'*Adelphi*, de *Drury Lane* — que Thalie leur pardonne — sont des produits sains de l'art anglais (art! grand dieu!...); que les bouffonneries, café-concert à la *Gaiety* et ailleurs sont artistiques, gracieux, et je ne sais quoi encore; que les mauvaises adaptations du grand Dumas et autres, le plus souvent mal jouées qui plus est, sont supérieures à l'original; que les pièces des quelques auteurs indigènes, qui ont pour ainsi dire obtenu un monopole, sont de petits chefs d'œuvre.

D'un autre côté ils traitent les modernes depuis Ibsen jusqu'à Sardou avec une sévérité draconienne, trouvant leurs pièces trop sombres, et surtout parce qu'ils craignent que leur écrasante supériorité n'ouvre les yeux du public et ne démasque combien les dramaturges anglais ont à apprendre de leurs voisins d'outre-mer.

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J'avoue que, quant à moi, j'admire cette manière de prêcher pour sa paroisse. C'est délicieux de trouver enfin un pays où les prophètes ne sont pas des étrangers. Mais quand je passe en revue le Théâtre anglais, quand j'entreprends le travail difficile et désagréable de comparer le goût de notre public à celui des grandes nations du continent, j'ai le cœur serré et je voudrais supplier mes confrères de traiter le théâtre national avec plus de sévérité pour rendre le public moins facile.

PETER THE GREAT

January 2. 1898.

It was in the fitness of things that Peter the Great should have his day on the English stage. In Germany Immerman dramatised his character as early as 1832, in his remarkable trilogy, „Alexis” (Peter’s unfortunate son). In France the inevitable melodramatist laid hands on the immortal Czar and dragged him down to the commonplace level of sensationalism. In Holland recently, in a little comedy written for amateurs, a young author tried his hand at the memorable episode of Zaandam. Other countries have now and again produced works with Peter among the dramatis personæ, but the play which would do justice to the greatness of the subject had yet to be written.

When Sir Henry Irving, who has hitherto betokened greater love for defunct dramatists than for the living, announced that he would open the golden gates of the Lyceum to a play by his son Laurence, with Peter the Great for his subject, expectation ran high. For Mr. Laurence Irving is a young man of remarkable gifts; as an actor he has won well-earned laurels in Ibsen’s most difficult play, “The Wild Duck.” As an author he has shown, in “Time, Hunger, and the Law,” although it is merely a one-act play, that he understands the *couleur locale* of Russia, and that he possesses more inventive power than a handful of our better known young dramatists.

No wonder, then, that the première was looked forward to with extraordinary curiosity; no wonder that the house was more densely packed than ever; that the magnetic fluid of enthusiasm seemed to flow from the topmost gallery to the back rows of the pit. And now that it is all over, we have to face the question of how far Mr. Laurence Irving succeeded in his stupendous task.

But before criticising, let us briefly examine the story of the play, for it will give an idea of the courage with which this young actor has tackled his subject. In the first act, the scene of which is laid in a hall at the palace, we are told that Peter, the Great Czar of Russia, has been made prisoner by the Turks, and witness the homage of the dissatisfied nobles to the Czarewitch Alexis. His mother, however, the Empress Eudoxia, coming out of her convent for the first time for twelve years—having been kept a prisoner at the bidding of the Czar—disbelieves the news, and, in her motherly love, goes even so far as to urge her son to love and admire his father's work. We are further told that the Czar is not a prisoner, but actually approaching the gates of his capital, and soon his appearance on the scene puts an end to all doubt. His mind being still unhinged by the loss of Kasan, he accuses his son of having set on foot a conspiracy against him, and as Alexis denies the charge, we have occasion to hear an unnatural father ordering his son to be put on the rack. The opportune appearance of Catherine, who, as we learn from Peter himself, has saved the Czar at the risk of her own life, and now pleads for his son, saves Alexis; and the good news of the re-capture of Riga softens the fierce mood of the Emperor. He consents to forgive his son on condition that the latter promises to devote himself to the study of political economy.

The second act opens in a farmer's hut near the battlefield of Pultawa. Outside a fierce storm and a great battle are raging, and inside we witness an undignified quarrel between Catherine, now empress, and Euphrosyne, a pretty, light-hearted creature, whose acquaintance we have already made in Act I., and who had captured the heart of Prince Alexis. After a somewhat stormy love scene between Alexis and Euphrosyne, and a new plot against the dreaded Czar, the latter returns from the battle, and there and then begins to examine his son as to the progress of his studies. Great is his wrath and disappointment on finding that his son has not acted up to his promise. He puts Alexis to the alternative: "Either the monastery or my work;" and upon his son's choosing the former, we, at last,

detect something like human feeling in the iron heart of the monarch, expressed in the few words to his general: "Tolstoi, I have no son."

The third act shows us a fortress near sunny Naples, with Vesuvius in the background. In this fortress Alexis and Euphrosyne are hiding, under the protection of the Emperor of Austria. We see how, through the thoughtlessness of Euphrosyne, Tolstoi and his colonel effect an entrance into the fortress, and surprise the Prince, who has fallen asleep in the garden. Subsequently he is persuaded to return with them to Russia and to certain death.

The next act is again laid in Russia, in the Council-room at the Palace. A council of war is summoned to decide the fate of Prince Alexis. Catherine is resolved to save him, and Eudoxia, the divorced Empress, is also present. Alexis denies the charges of plotting against the Czar's life, when Peter orders the poor tortured witness to be carried in. Euphrosyne appears as witness against her lover. This treachery breaks the prince's heart, and he fully confesses his share in the conspiracy. For the first time he dares speak bravely to his father's face, and in a forcible speech reproaches him with his barbarity and injustice. But his confession has sealed his fate, and the sentence of death is passed on him. Despite prayers and entreaty the Czar remains inexorable, and Catherine's imploring "Peter, Peter..." dies away in the distance, while she is being driven out by the guards. It is an effective scene and well acted.

Peter, left alone, is a prey to fierce mental struggle. His own heart of stone shrinks at the atrocious idea of a father signing the death-warrant of his own son. But at last he nerves his hand, and signs.

The play ends with a scene in the prison. Peter visits his son in his last hour, and asks his forgiveness, for the first time displaying gentler feelings. But, despite the new-awakened love between father and son, he insists that the prince must die. The poison-cup is brought in, and Alexis prepares to take it. The father meanwhile waits for the end, and, as Alexis breathes

his last, Tolstoi enters, bringing him the news of the death of his young son Peter. The Czar is childless.

I shall not here inquire into the historical merits or demerits of the play. I make it a rule, whenever I go to see a historical play, to leave history at the door, knowing that on the stage it is often falsified. But the question is: Is the language in which the play is written in harmony with the dignity of the subject? Has the play local colour? Is it human? And each of these three questions I must emphatically answer in the negative.

It has no local colour, for none of the characters are typically Russian, and nothing but the names reminds us that Muscovite blood flows in their veins.

And as to its being human? Take the character of the Czar as first example. We are only shown the cruel, unrelenting autocrat, the man of iron who revels in the effects of his barbarous cruelty, but we nowhere find a trace of the lofty mind, the man who established the greatness of Russia, created Petersburg, civilised his people. Next, Catherine, the generous impetuosity of whose character is exquisitely rendered by Miss Ellen Terry. But where are her other qualities, which, after Peter's death, made her the able, powerful ruler of his mighty empire? And only occasionally are we reminded of her low descent; this side of her nature is not brought out at all skilfully by the author, and at best she is a feeble imitation of Sardou's Mme. Sans-Gêne carried back to the first half of the last century.

Sardou! How often was this name on my lips as the play slowly, tediously, gloomily followed its endless course. Sardou has evidently been young Irving's model. He has seen *La Tosca*, and regales us with the awful tortures of Alexis and his friends. He has seen *Sans-Gêne*, and imitates the famous quarrel between the sisters; he has seen *Fedora*, who, like *Euphrosyne*, betrayed her lover. He has seen it all, the bye-work, the manœuvring with the masses, the invention of exquisite horrors, the concentration of the whole action in one single character, and the result is a nondescript

panorama—an ocean of useless speech—a texture of enormous conception, but loosely knit, slow in motion, full of rhetoric, but devoid of humanity.

It is a thousand pities that one should have thus to dispel the dream of a young author, whose career begins under auspices almost unique on the stage of the English-speaking world. However, the fault should not be laid at his door; he is young, inexperienced, exuberant in spirit, and imaginative; but Sir Henry Irving, with his tried judgment and great literary acumen, should have seen from the first that his son's work was not ripe, that the character of Peter was ill-balanced, that Alexis was a mere mass of fine talk, that the second act was intolerably long, insufferably tedious; that, except in the soliloquy of the third act, which Sir Henry spoke in a masterful way, the dialogue scarcely ever rose to the occasion. It was all very colloquial, common-place, and lacking in grip.

The public, ever courteous and patient at the Lyceum, even under adverse circumstances, endeavoured to infuse some enthusiasm into its applause. But the right note was missing; it was absent, too, in Sir Henry's final speech. He, the hero of so many successes, appeared to feel that this was a Pyrrhus-victory, for his address was full of repetitions and protestations, and emotion alone was not the mainspring of it all.

The acting calls for little comment. The young American, Mr. Robert Taber, moaned under the load of his thankless part like a man crushed by an avalanche, yet he did his best, and rose to something like true pathos in the last act; Miss Rockman, Euphrosyne, was altogether too much like a soubrette with a "twang" to enlist sympathy for this pitiable little light-o'-love; Mr. Mackintosh tried to lift the heavy scenes assigned to him; and the others, mostly labouring to get their voices heard in the chaos of noisy scenes, struggled manfully with material of which little could be made.

Sir Henry Irving alone, who dominated the entire play from beginning to end, stood out among the crowd like a Titan. His Peter—by the author's will—was never sympathetic, never like the emperor of our imagination, but he was a powerful in-

carnation of autocracy and towering self-reliance.

But even Sir Henry could not save the play, and, if it had been produced elsewhere than at the Lyceum, it would have fallen heavily to the ground, while now it was gently let off with a *succès d'estime*, and those who remembered Lortzing's opera forgave the author with the refrain :

"Oh, blissful are the days of youth !"



FIRST NIGHT AT THE GLOBE

Mr. John Hare in "A Bachelor's Romance."

January 9. 1898.

Good news, my friends. John Hare is back in London, and we all hope that he has come to stay. It looks like it, for the dusty, gloomy old Globe has had her gowns dyed and has become a stately dame, proud of her new colours and proud of herself that she is the hostess of one of England's best actors. We will not discuss this latter assertion; for one thing the printer's devil behind me will not wait, and for the rest I could not well prove my case—the excellent case of John Hare's pre-eminence—without treading upon sensitive toes. But I hail the return of John Hare, for he is one of the few who always would be missed in the London histrionic ranks; one of the very few who are no despots of the limelights. He is an actor-manager, yet he has not followed his brethren in their egotistic course. Often and often has he produced plays in which the first and second parts were in the hands of others, while he himself remained content with minor characters, such as the French stage language designates with the word *utilités*. He is, therefore, less known to the public at large than his younger colleagues, who take good care that their personality shall ever and ever meet the eye. But the inner circle, those who seek and know how to appreciate a good thing, even though it be not advertised like soap or porridge, admire and esteem John Hare, for they remember his wonderful studies of character—a little museum full of exquisite miniatures.

It was, therefore, a pleasure to learn that John Hare would greet his London friends with a play in which he would be the central figure, and impersonate the modern Benedick, round

whom Miss Martha Morton has woven her four act comedy, "A Bachelor's Romance."

Although new to London, this work is, strictly speaking, no novelty, for it has been tested both in England and Scotland, and it appears that both the play and the actor have pleased the fraternal country people of the United Kingdom.

This is not surprising, for John Hare is the man to carry a play upon his shoulders, and Miss Martha Morton is undoubtedly endowed with the gift and knowledge of theatrical optics. I mean she knows the business, and she has shown what she can do in her adaptation of L'Arronge's "Compagnon," which had less success than it deserved at the Criterion, when it was produced in an anglicised form under the title of "The Sleeping Partner." I dislike the process of adaptation, but this work, which was German to the core, she turned so neatly into English, that it had almost the savour and freshness of originality. Now can as much be said for the "Bachelor's Romance?" Hullo! what is that? Am I treating Martha Morton's latest as an adaptation from the German? How very naughty of me, and how ungallant! I ask a thousand pardons, but "c'était plus fort que moi". You see I know the whole family, the L'Arronges, the Mosers, Schoentans, Rosens, Lubliners, all the jolly fellows who have in their little way, done a good deal for the world's merriment. And as the action of "A Bachelor's Romance" proceeded, I could not help thinking of "Der Stoerenfried" by Benedix (a celebrated comedy of the sixties); there was the old bachelor, there was the little vixen, there was the Yellow Monster creeping upon the crusty celibate, there was Cupid, little devil, with his bow and arrows, which went pang-pang into Benedick's heart, there was——. But, never mind, I do not dream for a moment that Miss Morton has read Benedix or anybody else (I wish she would, though, for she can do good work if she will bring the English stage a little nearer to the German drama); the world is one huge compound of hazards and coincidences, and the resemblance of "A Bachelor's Romance" to some German plays is, no doubt, accidental.

It is undeniable that the play was a great success; of course,

Mr. Hare's personal popularity goes for something in it, but something was due to the other actors, and a good deal to the authoress. After all, the tragi-comedy of middle-age is ever interesting; we have enjoyed it recently in Pinero's *Princess and the Butterfly*. We have enjoyed it also in *The Physician*, and we have liked it again to-night in Martha Morton's sweet and inoffensive little comedy. One must not for one moment imagine that "The Bachelor's Romance" was in any way life-like. Oh dear, no; in life old bachelors are not preferred to handsome young swains by sweet eighteen. The said old bachelors, even though they live among dust and books, are not so blind and so stupid as not to perceive that a young thing buzzing around them is only too willing to be caught in the net of matrimony. All that belongs to the realm of German sentimentality and—one better—to the heavenly regions of the fairy-tales. And, as such, one must regard Martha Morton's play; it is a "Maerchen," pitched in a modern key, but in the good old atmosphere of love, of kisses, of the blissful; and they lived happily ever after.

I am not going to analyse this play; there is hardly a story to tell, and the telling would spoil it. Criticism also would spoil it, and therefore I say: Go and see how David Holmes, the bookworm and recluse, was gently, cunningly drawn into matrimony, and how John Hare, in his quiet, unaffected, artless way performed the metamorphosis to life-like perfection. I also say: Go and see how cleverly Miss Martha Morton has caught the German dramatic trick of marrying almost all her people at the end of the fourth act—save the three servants. She does it as adroitly as Mr. Maskelyne manipulates his pack of cards, and if we know that we are "had," and that life is not at all as matrimonial and as sweet as it is painted, we do not grumble, for plays like this, charmingly acted by a competent company comprising Mr. Hare's son Gilbert, Mr. Fred Kerr, Misses May Harvey, Susie Vaughan, and particularly Miss Nellie Thorne (David Holme's conquering heroine), are in gentle contrast to the toil and trouble of every-day life. Such a play is really "much ado about nothing." But it is a *dolce far niente*.

THE DRAMA IN 1897.

January 16. 1898.

The record is one of which we have no reason to be proud. One glance over the long list of productions on the English stage suffices to substantiate the verdict: The British drama is declining fast. And if it were not for Messrs. Pinero, Jones, L. N. Parker, Carton—the older guard, and for the hopes we entertain of H. V. Esmond, we would say without hesitation: There is no longer such a thing as modern British drama. As it is, the reflection is sad enough, that in a country of thirty-eight millions not more than half a dozen men have the power or desire to write plays which are in some measure above the dead-level of the commonplace.

Of course there is an enormous output of plays in England, as there is a bewildering crop of daubs and stupid books, for everybody dabbles in "art" nowadays, and plays are perpetrated by all sorts and conditions of illiterate people. But at the end of the year one finds that this short space has played havoc with the poor stuff which has been placed before the public, and that very, very little survives even in the recollection of the most earnest and most ardent playgoers. They can be counted on one's fingers, the original plays of 1897 which were worth seeing and deserve serious consideration.

Mr. Pinero gave us his fanciful "Princess and the Butterfly," marred by a bad fourth act; Mr. Jones made a mark with "The Physician" and "The Liars," two works which have enhanced his reputation; Mr. Louis Napoleon Parker hit upon an excellent subject in "The Vagabond King," but fell a victim to his own exuberance—was ever a fascinating story so wantonly killed by a childish, crude, and unnecessary termination? He also wrote "The Happy Life," the subject of which was naïve

and ludicrous in the extreme (take care, fellow-bachelors, that you never play the Samaritan to a girl at night-time in your chambers, for you will have to marry her to pacify Mrs. Grundy!). Mr. Parker has yet to redeem the promise of his earlier days. Mr. Carton's "White Elephant" was a cleverly-written comedy of little importance, and his "Tree of Knowledge" was interesting, and proved that there is no necessity to go to France for unsavoury subjects. Since Mr. Pinero's memorable "Second Mrs. Tanqueray" the *femme entretenue* has made considerable progress on our stage, and the public appears not adverse to making her acquaintance, provided a popular actor-manager assumes the responsibility of her introduction; while the critics (the same critics who denounced Ibsen and his partisans) play the part of the guileless *duègne*; all of which is very cheerful.

Mr. H. V. Esmond—a constant target of Mr. Clement Scott's hysterical hostility, and, therefore, obviously a writer of original ideas—has provided Mr. Charles Hawtrey with a charming comedy, entitled "One Summer's Day," which would have deserved a prize for the best comedy, of the year but for some unnecessary tom-foolery in the third act, which is essentially British and wholly inartistic. Mr. H. V. Esmond is the only young dramatic author who has latterly come to the fore, and it is devoutly to be hoped that he has come to stay. In mentioning Mr. Barrie's skilful but very free adaptation of "The Little Minister"—a sweet play of the *noli me tangere* order, for it is delicate fancy and by no means lifelike—and Mr. Gillette's "Secret Service," which was much overrated and proved very dull when handled by our own actors in succession to the author's company, all new English plays worth speaking of have been named. I have on purpose omitted Henley and Stevenson's "Admiral Guinea", produced by the New Century Theatre, for the play is not new, and I do not think it a remarkable drama. It is beautifully, powerfully written; it is a work intensely to be enjoyed at the fireside, but it is of the study, not of the stage. What was the fare of the other theatres, is the next question. And the answer is: Mostly bad or mostly French. I say "most-

ly," for we have had a few revivals like "Sweet Nancy," "The Wild Duck" and "Norah;" we have had an excellent "Hamlet" by Mr. Forbes Robertson at the Lyceum (the only good Hamlet I have ever seen in England); but the great bulk of the work produced had nothing to do with the British drama. In fact, things had come to such a pass that, during several weeks the playbills of eight London theatres announced adaptations from the French, five houses performed musical comedies—neither drama nor art, but merely exalted "tingel-tangel"—and the Court Theatre produced what purported to be an adaptation of Humperdinck's "Koenigskinder," but was really an outrage upon the master's work. A proud achievement for the commercial system!

I elect to leave the "mostly bad" plays alone, otherwise I should have to give a long, black list with "The Seats of the Mighty"—which, forsooth, was chosen to open Her Majesty's—at its head. But of the French plays, some are worth mentioning: "Madame Sans-Gêne" (cockneyfied by Mr. Comyns Carr) failed to rouse much enthusiasm, because the main parts suited neither Sir Henry Irving nor Miss Terry; on the other hand, Dumas *père*, who curiously enough has not attracted the British adaptor as much as he deserved, enjoyed a great measure of posthumous glory. "A Marriage of Convenience" at the Haymarket was voted most entertaining, and "the Silver Key" at Her Majesty's would have had a longer life, if Mr. Grundy, the adaptor, had been less prone to improve upon the master, and if the acting had been more spirited and refined. "Saucy Sally," Mr. Burnard's version of "La Flamboyante," did well for a time at the Comedy, was very funny, and again placed Mr. Hawtrey a step nearer to Charles Wyndham, the premier comedian of the English-speaking world. The Vaudeville scored with "A Night Out" and "Never Again," things to be laughed at, but not to be treated seriously; and the Shaftesbury, Prince of Wales, and Garrick owed much of their temporary prosperity to the revival of the public taste for opera comique. This latter manifestation, together with the re-appearance of Dumas' plays, is one of the few bright points of the seamy review of 1897. If

Dumas and his followers and the foreign masters of the lighter opera, are allowed to maintain for a time their hold on the English stage, there will be something to look forward to. They will not stimulate native production to any great extent, I admit ; only the establishment of a state-aided and non-commercial theatre can do that. They will, perhaps, slowly lead the public to appreciate something better than inane farces, absurd melodrama, and the music-hall fare, which is now so often the stock-in-trade of many of our theatres.

But there is no gladness in the remembrance of the year's work.

TRELAWNY OF THE "WELLS."

January. 1898

Mr. Pinero, with a modesty bordering on humility, calls this delightful play a comedietta. He wants us, therefore, to take it lightly, and not to consider it as a finished picture of some theatrical and non-theatrical folk of the crinoline and horse-hair sofa days. But however light his touch, however sketchy his characters, however thin the thread of plot that strings the four acts together, there is far more depth in this little work than in many volumes of bulky proportions.

The question is, will the large world of playgoers see and understand the play as it ought to be seen and understood? Mr. Pinero has oftentimes done things which enchanted the few and bewildered the many; "The Times" is an example; the memorable "Cabinet Minister" is another; yet another is "The Amazons;" and all of these, for which he has been sparsely praised, are of his later and glorious days. Earlier, when he had not yet "arrived," and wrote in that same half satirical, half pathetic style which is all his own, he was roundly abused. No man has encountered more treacherous nails and splinters upon the ladder of fame than our Pinero. And even now, while we hail him as the premier playwright of the English-speaking world, it would seem that the public is slow to appreciate Pinero at his best; it would have little of the fascinating "Princess and the Butterfly," and it is by no means certain whether it will enjoy to the full the exquisite charm of "Trelawny." For our author leads us into a sphere which is foreign to most, even though their memory reaches back to the period when the eccentric theatre—*i.e.*, the theatre on the fringe of West London—was in the lowest water.

Yet what a field of humour and of true comedy, what a treasure-trove for an observant man! And Pinero, whose eyes dwell as keenly on the past as they do on modern society, has drawn a wonderfully vivid picture of the simple-minded, kind-hearted, rough-and-ready "cabotins" who flourished at the "Wells," and of the fossilized gentlefolk who lived in cold monotony in fashionable squares. This Rose, who, like "*bon chien chasse de race*," is not happy when she is taken from the stage to the noble mansion of her fiancé's grandfather, to see how she would acclimatise; this Tom Wrench, sick of stiltedness and convention, and yearning to give something of his simple, natural self in a play of unconventional form; this Avonia, common little creature, wont to please the lowly crowd with her freaks and funny little ways, yet warm-blooded and kind of heart as the best of women; these mummers all, whose H's rise and fall like the tide, are no mere puppets of the author's conceit. No; they are sketched from life, and, perhaps, a little rouged and made up for the purpose of the stage; but, if we try to understand them, we can feel for them, and live with them. The author is not quite so happy in his portraiture of the non-theatrical folk; here the satirist is uppermost, and, if young Gower, who wooed Rose, is a normal type of a young gentleman of the sixties, the Vice-Chancellor, Sir William Gower, his sister, and his friends, are more or less caricatures, obviously overdrawn for the purpose of contrast, but, for this reason, the weaker part of the play.

However, it matters little that the collateral characters are more fanciful than real; I would even venture to say that the very exaggeration enhances the charm of the play. It is from beginning to end highly diverting; it is episodically deeply interesting, and, to those who are intimate with the world behind the footlights, it is a conceit of amazing cleverness.

As usual, Mr. Pinero has the good fortune to be well interpreted. I have but to take exception to two impersonations. Mr. Dion Boucicault is undoubtedly clever, but he seems to forget that our London palate is more sensitive to the condiment of "overdoing" than colonial taste. His performance as the old

Vice-Chancellor constantly reminded us that a comparatively young man endeavoured to embody old age; it reminded us also of how great a loss the Court Theatre sustained in Arthur Cecil. And in the abundantly paragraphed Mr. James Erskine, however painstaking he was, I discovered none of those qualifications which justified his being preferred to one of the many tried and hard-working actors who appear to be "resting" just now. Acting in "thinking parts" and a thorough training in elocution and deportment, would, I submit, be of greater service to Mr. Erskine than his present occupation. Miss Irene Vanbrugh was a charming Rose; the part is long, difficult, and somewhat unsuited to her delicate style, but she conquered the obstacles with flying colours. Miss Hilda Spong had to do what would have been a fitting task for Marie Wilton; that she did not altogether fail is to her credit. Mr. Athol Forde as the old actor, Mr. Robson as the funny little Colroys, and Mr. Paul Arthur as Wrench, the yearning author, were an admirable triumvirate. But smaller parts were equally well done by Miss Bateman, Miss Le Thiere, Miss Eva Williams, Mr. Du Maurier—in fact, I should like to transcribe the whole cast with a menu of fitting adjectives, for Mr. Pinero always chooses the right people. On purpose I have not yet named Miss Pattie Browne, who was the joy of the evening as Avonia. True, the part plays itself, as it were; but Miss Pattie Browne endowed it with so much vivacity, so much *savoir faire*, engendered by vast experience, that the character, which is only secondary, stood out in brilliant prominence.

All things considered, "Trelawny of the Wells" will hold its own in the record of Mr. Pinero, and if London is to be taken by charm, it will assuredly capitulate.

JULIUS CÆSAR

January 23. 1898.

I congratulate Mr. Tree. The production of "Julius Cæsar" is a step in the right direction. It condones to some extent the exceedingly unfortunate record of that sumptuous house in the Haymarket (christened by the grace of Her Majesty) whose guardian has been strangely remiss in devoting it to work worthy of the Royal favour. Both "The Seats of the Mighty" and the revival of "A Man's Shadow", were sad examples of actor-managerial shortsightedness (nor was the performance of "The Silver Key" of flawless excellence), and to obliterate so bad and so unprofitable a record much had to be done.

The question arises: Why was "Julius Cæsar" not revived to celebrate the opening of this theatre, as was originally announced? Why was almost a year, to say naught of money and talent, wasted before Mr. Tree's promise was redeemed? Perhaps the answer will be that it concerns us not, and I am ready to grant it. But if it be not our individual affair, we yet have a right to ask the question, since criticism forms the basis of the histrionic annals, and it would be well that the early days of the new Her Majesty's Theatre should not be chronicled (to the detriment of its founder) without the *auditur et altera*. I do not refer to the past to be unnecessarily harsh upon Mr. Tree. I wish him well, as he will read anon in my remarks upon his latest production; but as I hold that the present system of theatrical enterprise is radically wrong, I could not refrain from adducing the striking proof afforded by the policy at Her Majesty's.

But enough of by-gones. Let us turn to the events of this evening, which have made a profound impression on our mind,

for the whole audience cheered to the echo, and if their enthusiasm flagged awhile during the third act (Shakespeare's fourth and fifth acts), the fault was not the players', it was the bard's. O, that this great tragedy had been allowed to end when the people rush from the Forum to the houses of the conspirators and mete out their reward to them with overflowing cups of wrath ! But in the days of Shakespeare not much could be left to the imagination of an uneducated crowd. Everything had to be thrashed out, and if the tragedy had not reached a noisy climax in clamour, steel and blood, it would have been voted incomplete, and unworthy of the master. Therefore, in spite of our interest being strained to its highest tension when Antony has delivered his glorious oration, we have to traverse two acts, in which the doom of the murderers and the apotheosis of the avengers is prepared, and meanwhile our attention begins to tire. True, Mr. Tree has condensed these two acts into one, and I shall not blame him for it, but the last act is fatal to play, and explains its comparative unpopularity in all countries where Shakespeare is cherished. There is another reason ; the female interest is of the slightest. Two scenes all told—one between Brutus and Portia, the other between Cæsar and his wife ; and both, however exquisitely tender they are—for in the former Shakespeare is at his best—are but fragmentary outlines of the characters of these lovable women. "Julius Cæsar" was evidently written to be a man's play, and such it is. It is virile to a degree ; not all Shakespeare's, not all the world's literature, contains four such superb characters as Cæsar, Antony, Brutus and Cassius. They do not merely belong to the life of their time ; they belong to all times, for they are of the human composition which knows no age. And yet—the sad reflection besieges me again—this play of "Julius Cæsar" has never held the public spell-bound, as "Hamlet" did, or "Macbeth," or "Richard" ; not even the Meiningers, whose production of twenty years ago was a feast to the eye and to the ear, with Ludwig Barnay as an unsurpassable Antony, succeeded in establishing the tragedy for ever in the world's favour. Fate evidently does exist for works of art as well as for the living man.

It was clear from the first that Mr. Tree would play Antony; the great oration was written, as it were, to please the "stars." Yet Antony is by no means the finest part of the play, and if I were an actor, I would rather vacillate between the choice of Cassius and Brutus than pin my faith to Antony. For if the character is much in evidence, if it is interesting and grateful to a degree, it is at the same time dangerous to undertake. If ever the limitations of an actor will become apparent, it is in the Senate scene and on the Forum. Here genius, talent, force, temperament, imagination severally will not suffice, nor will two of them jointly carry the day. All is required, and that totality is immense. It would be flattery to say that Mr. Tree is the proud possessor of all these divine gifts. Barnay owned them, and his Antony was unique; but our actor is a talented, versatile man, and what he does is interesting. Let me confess, then, that I found his Antony more picturesque than forcible, more striking than convincing, more excellent in elocution than great through innate eloquence. It sounds like lukewarm praise, does it not? But since I am not of those who are wont to shower hyperbolic praise unless my heart and soul are ablaze with boundless admiration—since I judge artists in the front rank by the high standard, and with the severity becoming their position—what I have said about Mr. Tree is high eulogy indeed, and I will add to it that his Antony will enhance his reputation. And when I come to Brutus—Mr. Lewis Waller—and to Cassius—Mr. Franklyn McLeay—I feel that calm words will almost fail to do them justice. Such grandeur! such power! such wealth of genuine emotion! If acting like this were less rare upon our stage there would be no need to bewail its poverty. Mr. McLeay was indeed the Cassius of history; he gave us all he has to give, and that is much; henceforth he will be watched as one in whose career the modern stage is deeply interested. As for Mr. Waller as Brutus, when he stood upon the Forum and in his powerful voice addressed the crowd, I remembered Barnay. Yes, Waller is the man who one day should play Antony. Mr. Charles Fulton's Caesar, too, was admirable. His face was like a copy of an old

Roman coin, his countenance was full of dignity, his delivery calm, measured, powerful. Mr. Fulton, although he has done much good work, has never acted with so much *éclat*. Of the ladies, only one was good—Miss Lily Hanbury as Calphurnia. She, at least, has a conception of what Roman women, like Cæsar's wife, were; she was tender and regal, she looked imposing, and was yet every inch a woman. But Miss Evelyn Millard fell entirely out of the picture; she was altogether modern; the Portias and Cornelias are apparently strangers to her. Rome's women were no little love-lorn wives of the suburban villa type. They were their husbands' mates, their inferiors in law, but at home they upheld the sacredness and dignity of the hearth. If this is not understood, the great scene between Brutus and Portia is mere flat "comédie de salon." And thus it was here.

It is hardly necessary to insist on the mistake of Mrs. Tree's selection for Lucius. The part is of not much consequence, and there is no reason why it should not be played by a young actor. Mrs. Tree was wasted upon it.

The performance was, withal, one of great taste, of earnest and painstaking preparation, and if in some tableaux the stage management was not very skilful, the scene of the murder in the Senate and the arrangement of the Forum were grand in the truest sense of the word, thanks to the invaluable supervision of Mr. Tadema and also to Mr. Tree's own exertions. What great things would he not do if he were not entangled in the meshes of management! For whoever produces "Julius Cæsar" on such a scale of discreet magnificence, whoever knows how to manipulate crowds with such dexterity that Jean Jullien's words: "Realism is to transplant a slice of life to the stage in an artistic manner," become realised to the letter, is an artist of great and sensitive distinction.

The public evidently felt this, and in the outburst of cheers which crowned the evening's work there was an accent of such unalloyed sincerity that Mr. Tree may well quote Cæsar's word: "Mine is the victory."

SUDERMANN'S "JOHANNES."

February 6. 1898.

It would not be exaggerating to assert that Hermann Sudermann, as a writer, reveals a dual personality. There is Sudermann the artist, and Sudermann the craftsman. The former combines in his work both art and craft, for Sudermann has the "technique" at his fingers' ends. The latter would fain disguise his aim at mere effect under a thin cloak of artistic pretension—but in vain. When "Magda" and "Schmetterlings-schlacht" are brought face to face with "Die Ehre," "Das Glueck im Winkel," the novels "Es war" and "Der Katzensteg," there remains no doubt as to the paternity. Sudermann, the artist, is a stranger to the two first-named pieces; he wrote them *pour le bon motif*, like Sardou wrote his "Fedoras," "Toscas," "Theodoras," things for all climates, all ears, apt to unstring all purses, immensely clever, but hardly worthy of their creators. But in "Die Ehre" and the other works I have named, there is stuff of the finest kind; there is the manifest desire to graft the fruits of careful observation and thought upon stage and book, and thus to produce a work which shall rank as high art.

There was a time when Sudermann was the dramatic Messiah of the majority in Germany; but when Hauptmann came with the immensity of his power—his concentrative style, which even beats Kipling at his best—Sudermann had to stand back, and has since remained a brilliant exponent of the second magnitude.

He is, however, not of those who will abandon the front rank without fierce battle. His ambition is only equalled by his daring; and, conscious as he must be of the enormity of his

task, he has yet ventured to try his strength on "John the Baptist." I confess to great admiration for such valour. For one thing, it shows that yonder in Berlin commercialism has not entirely eradicated the joy and the desire of creating great work; and then I fully realise what it means to bring upon the stage a Biblical character which is familiar to every man and child, and an episode which, though many years have passed since our Bible lessons, lives in our minds more vividly than national history itself.

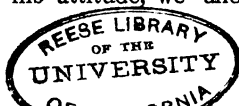
We should, therefore, make allowance from the first. We should not forget that only a gigantic poetic mind (which Sudermann is not), such as Shakespeare, Goethe, Hugo, could transplant the story and the characters to the stage with such completeness, yet with such reverence, that we should exclaim, in spite of ourselves: "Behold! They have stepped out of the Testament!"

Now Sudermann at once convinces us that his work does not stand upon the highest plane; in fact, that he has not the strength to carry the mountain which he has thought fit to lift upon his shoulders. He has written his play in prose—the prose of to-day oftentimes moulded after the idiom of the German Bible. The result is not quite satisfactory, nor has the author been able to uphold this exalted form of expression. There are passages, such as John's description of his meeting with Christ, and his repulsion of Salome, which are of exquisite simplicity, and of such beauty that the word sublime, which the German Emperor is said to have applied to the whole drama, seems none too hyperbolical. But there are others of woeful commonplace, and when on page 143 Vitellius says to Herod: "Bei Rom bist Du zu Gaste, mein Fuerst, drum nehm ich was mir geziemt" (which was indeed a nasty cut), and Gaboles answers "Au, das thut weh," I have a sensation of tumbling from Olympus into the husky atmosphere of a modern Bier-Halle. It seems a trifle, I admit—and as a rule I hate to stickle at such things—but in a work like this it is of marked importance. These transitions, and there are many, from the classic and the sublime to the modern and the vulgar, signify either a

singular obtuseness to the harmony of language, or incompetence to reproduce the colloquial intercourse of the period.

So much for the form of the play, which, reading it aloud to myself, inspires me with an impression of dignity, of grace, and at times of force, but rarely of grandeur. I fear that prose is fatal to the dramatic embodiment of ancient history.

As for the construction, it is almost masterly. With immense dexterity Sudermann has lifted the entire episode of John's entrance into Jerusalem from the Holy Book. Nothing is wanting from the history with which we are all familiar; the prologue announcing John's decision to go to the town and upbraid the king; the struggle with the Pharisees; the defiance of the king; the indictment of the queen; the amorous overtures of Salome; her hatred and revenge, ending in John's doom;—it is all there; and, as the acts proceed, the story ascends in calm but fascinating steps from climax to climax, until we reach the end, and, with the end, the one overwhelming moment of the play. The last scene is really of extraordinary beauty. It is grandly conceived, and executed with befitting exaltation. When Salome, with John's head on the golden vessel, has danced until she swoons in delirious frenzy, "Hosannahs" rise from below the terrace of the palace; for Jesus, the King of the Jews, is acclaimed by the people. The king remains defiant; he is in wine, and with a full cup in his hand, he rushes on to the highest step of the terrace, exclaiming, "I greet thee, King of—," and then he falters. The light of Christ's eyes has struck him, and he hides his face in his mantle. Below roar the waves of the "Hosannah." One must have some dramatic instinct to appreciate on mere reading the greatness of this end; what it would be on the stage I can only surmise, but I hear on all sides that the impression on the first night was immense, and that it was intensified from performance to performance. I consider this part of Sudermann's work all the more artistic since the effect is attained with simple means, and with a high sense of reverence; for we do not see Christ, we do not see the people, we only hear their shouts and the words of Herod, but through his countenance and his attitude, we understand more than



pageant and rhetoric could ever tell us.

In the theatrical composition lie the great merits of the play, for the characterisation is, I do not like to say poor, but flimsy. I find it even perplexing, because there is such a host of active *dramatis personæ* that one and all seem rather to be drawn with a nimble crayon, than fixed upon the panel with the flesh and blood of a fine brush and mellow colours. Salome and Herodias are undoubtedly portrayed with the greatest finish. With unwavering clearness, Sudermann depicts the animal nature of these two women; Herodias is a terrible specimen of the tragedy of middle-age, of the "retour" in a woman's life, the consciousness of which degrades her to such a degree that she even stoops to barter away her daughter in order to rouse the king. Nor does Sudermann allow any doubts as to Salome's designs upon John. There is not the slightest psychical inducement on her part; she is lustful, she desires him for his personality, not for the magnetism of his address or the glory of his name. Hers is an entirely carnal nature, and her every word is feverish with passion. The king is only a marionette; his words, too, are the language of the sybarite, but he is drawn with less grip than his princesses. He had to appear, because he belongs to the story, but Sudermann bestowed as little pains on him as Shakespeare did on Hamlet's stepfather. It is a thankless part, I fear, for an actor, except in the last scene. From reading alone I do not venture a definite opinion upon John. The character seems extremely complex and somewhat unfinished. In the prologue he is at his best; then again in the temptation scene when he rejects Salome. But I admit that at times he is incomprehensible to me; he is Christ's precursor, his prophet as it were, yet there is a tinge of jealousy in his speech, and when he is asked what the Master will teach, he fails to give a straightforward answer, and even expresses astonishment when Simon of Galitæa proclaims that love will be the doctrine. He appears more as a fanatic than as a great and firm believer, and it is undeniable that the character loses thereby some of its grandeur.

For this reason, and also on account of the inequality of the

language, the play is not one which holds the reader in breathless enthrallment. It does not, like a true tragedy, chain one to the chair; it does not rouse intense emotion, or make the heart ache; it is not simple, not human enough for that. Yet it is always interesting, and when, under the influence of the final climax, one's thoughts linger over the play in its entirety, Sudermann's "Johannes" discloses the promise of great achievement in days to come.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

Mr. Alexander's Production.

20 February. 1898.

"I say that if this story were told in Paris people would not believe it." Some will remember that thus ran the last words of Newki-Dumas' admirable "Danichefs," a play, by the way, which would repay reviving in England. It was the *raisonneur* who summed up the whole situation in one telling sentence, and I was involuntarily reminded of him when my eye fell on the dramatic columns in the newspapers of this week.

Whether the continent will or will not believe it, it is true as gospel that in the second month of A.D. 1898 the three principal theatres of London were devoted to the worship of the late Mr. William Shakespeare, the self-made William Shakespeare whose name and work, but a decade ago, were said "to spell ruin," while now the crowd so eagerly beleaguers the playhouse that the managers are troubled with *embarras de richesse*. Tell me after this that the public cannot, will not, must not be educated, elevated, and I shall give the lie direct; for I know that the crowd, which is ever ready to be amused, is amenable to a more refined intellectual occupation, provided it be held not merely by outward splendour, but by the excellence of the performance. And while in years gone by everything was sacrificed to "stars" and paraphernalia, we have now reached a higher artistic plane, where the utmost attention is bestowed on the impersonation of every character, from the most important to the most inferior. Hence the success of Sir Henry Irving's revival; hence the unprecedented triumph of "Julius Cæsar" at Her Majesty's—a play, forsooth, which was reputed to be of unending vitality; hence, last Wednesday, the bound-

less enthusiasm which greeted Mr. Alexander's second Shakespeare venture, "Much Ado About Nothing."

It was, on the whole, a very respectable performance—so carefully and lavishly prepared, and so cordially well-intentioned, that one would not wish for a better pavement of the road towards "excelsior." But without wishing to detract from indisputable merits, or to underrate the value of the manifestations of delight which crowned a successful afternoon, I must emphasise the fact that the interpretation was strangely uneven, and the spirit of the players somewhat contrary to the conception of the work as it has been sanctified by tradition.

This article is scarcely the place for a learned disquisition on a play which every schoolboy has at his fingers' ends; or to sing rhapsodies on the exquisite charms of Benedick's and Beatrice's love-game; or to repeat what has been often said before, that the Dogberry-scenes, as I will call them, are a woeful flaw in a masterpiece. Even Shakespeare, alas, had to pay the toll of "comic relief" to the gatekeepers of popular favour. But it seems necessary to insist with some stress that "Much Ado About Nothing" is not a farce, however overflowing with humour it be, but a comedy of the purest water; an ingenious and profound study of character. I cannot say whether this has been intentionally ignored at the St. James's Theatre, but the fact remains that most of the actors were inclined to cast their parts in a farcical mould, and that even Mr. Alexander—who seemed to delight in a little by-play *à la* Marie Lloyd with the feathers of his hat after the garden-scene, where Leonato, Pedro, and Claudio plot Benedick's marriage—drifted from time to time into the torrents of boisterous exultation. And this was all the more ill-advised, since most of the players were unaccustomed and unsuited to farcical acting, so that at times, when there was no opportunity to work with full pressure, the contrast became very marked and produced languor. Miss Julia Neilson, a Beatrice lovely to behold, was the main sufferer by this misconception. She is by nature a dramatic actress, not a comedienne, and if she had played quietly, without affectation, as Miss Fay Davis (Hero) did, she would have made a mark;

for the character is full of innate gaiety. But she would be funny, she would be kittenish, and full of an all too impetuous joy of living; now she borrowed her intonations from Ellen Terry, then from Ada Rehan; and both her voice and the unnatural suppleness of her movements, betrayed that she was neither herself nor, indeed, the youthful, merry, unaffected Beatrice.

Mr. Alexander was, it has been said before, now and again too eager to make points and to count the laughs of his audience, but on the whole his performance was admirable. To be quite candid, I believe Mr. Alexander to be more suited to high-class comedy than to frock-coated, drawing-room heroism. He is full of intelligence, and has studied hard. There is not a meaning which escapes him. Even such little details as his dancing with Beatrice in the first act, when he betokens his recalcitrance by stamping his foot in the middle of the minuet, prove how entirely he has entered into the skin of his character. Moreover, he is a youthful Benedick, he bears his mature bachelorhood with every grace, and where formerly Henry Irving was acid and sarcastic towards Beatrice (a perfectly acceptable rendering), the latest Benedick was good-naturedly quick of repartee: *ad rem*, as modern Latins would call it. There is no doubt that after this experiment, which was more successful than "As You Like It," Mr. Alexander should be encouraged to exploit Shakespearean comedy.

I fear that the scenes in which Dogberry and Verges played their pranks became nowise more agreeable by the rendering of Mr. H. H. Vincent and Mr. H. V. Esmond. The latter went even so far as to pitch his young voice in an old key, which amplified the caricature. But, after all, why seek the mote with the actors when the beam is the author's?

Mr. Fred Terry as Don Pedro was excellent. It was a refined, chivalrous, and vivacious impersonation; it placed the part in *haut relief*, which is but rarely the case, for, to my recollection, this is the first time that the character of Pedro has left a lasting impression. There is also no fault to be found with Mr. Vernon's Leonato: these actors of the older school play with a

grip and correctness which is truly amazing, and the mature fruit of hard work in younger days.

Mr. H. B. Irving is advancing. He, too, is evidently an ardent student; and if the great pains he bestowed, particularly on his diction and on the embodiment of Don John, tended to show the character in all its acerbity and ugliness, one could not help appreciating the earnestness and the intensity of the young actor.

Having said thus much about the performers, there remains but little to add. That Mr. Alexander would frame the delightful panels of the play in grace and beauty was a foregone conclusion; but he has done more than that. He has enlisted the winsome talent of Mr. Edward German—the man who could write a classical English opera if he would—to underline the text, and he has made much of the luxury and gaiety which reigned in the mansion of Messina's governor, Leonato.

It is customary nowadays to submit Shakespeare to a process of slight compression, in order to prevent inordinate length of performance, and Mr. Alexander, with a free hand, has transposed some scenes to suit his purpose. Whether this was judicious remains an open question, although it cannot be denied that the third act, ending with Dogberry's examination of Conrade and Borachio, fell lamentably flat.

However, it would be ungracious to quarrel about trifles when there is much to praise; and, after all, a Shakespearean revival in one of the first theatres of the metropolis is such an auspicious event, that one may well enrol it in the dramatic calendar as a red-letter day.

AN ACADEMY OF ACTING

Teaching the Young Idea.

March 27. 1898.

It has been my privilege to discourse before the members of the Grosvenor Crescent Club on the present conditions of the art of acting in England, and on the necessity of a Dramatic Academy. The question is a very old one, which, like the sea-serpent in times of journalistic famine, crops up as a convenient provider of copy. But the present moment seems particularly propitious to renew the plea, since the project of an endowed theatre is not only much "in the air," but has, at any rate in our city of progress, Manchester, met with so much support that realisation seems nearer than ever before. And from the Endowed Theatre the idea of an Academy is absolutely inseparable.

There is another reason why we should be prepared to countenance the possibilities of an Academy with all the earnestness due to its importance, and not brush the matter lightly aside as a "fad," as a foreign notion unsuited to England, as a thing both useless and uncalled for. I contend that more than ever do we indeed want a plan of education for those who aspire to become actors, since long runs of plays have not only minimised their chances of studying their art in London with some hope of acquiring versatility, but have also become systematic with the majority of stock-companies, so that the opportunity of gaining experience—however rough and faulty—by playing many parts in the provinces is no more. Moreover, the stage is nowadays woefully invaded by interlopers, people who have no other title to engagement than the possession of money, of a pretty face, or the distinction of having been

highly-born, or of having undraped the nether limbs at fashionable theatres with conspicuous success. These people, who can be numbered by scores, do not only take the daily bread from well-deserving mouths (see in the *Era* how many capable artists are resting), but are responsible for the terrible degree of mediocrity which reigns in nearly every London theatre and every company "on the road." They are the canker of our stage; they are the cause of the unenviable reputation which English acting still enjoys in nearly every country of the Continent; and they will continue to gain ground so long as the stage remains open to every unqualified lad or damsel who chooses it as a profession (*grand Dieu!*) because they know their own uselessness in any other calling. Some—many, perhaps—will doubt that education alone will modify this state of affairs; but I am firm in my belief, which is founded on observation in countries where a diploma is a passport to the boards, and where mere good intentions, without previous study, go for very little or nothing. And it must not be forgotten that abroad the long run is a thing of comparative novelty—a thing which is not encouraged by the press or the public. For this reason the budding foreign actor, who has many parts to play and to study during the year, has ample opportunity to learn by practice the elements of his craft. Yet, for all that, the best theatres give preference to actors who have been educated for the stage in a scholarly manner, and a first prize at the Conservatoire is rightly an unwritten claim upon the Odéon, or even upon the first theatre of the world—the Français.

The above is but an epitome of the remarks with which at the Grosvenor Crescent Club I prefaced the exposition of my scheme for a British Academy. The scheme itself is not quite new. I formulated it and brought it forward as long as five years ago; and if I recur to it now, I do so because the times have grown riper for the realisation of my wishes, which were then derided as Utopian, and because deeper study of the subject has not convinced me of the necessity of modifying its main lines. That in detail there remains much to discuss, to amend, and to amplify, goes without saying.

Not being a pedagogue, it is not within my province or my power to bring forward an educational programme which will be voted fair and square on all sides; all I have done is to select from the methods of the best-known schools of acting in Europe, those features which seemed commendable to me and particularly adaptable to this country. It strikes me—and my opinion has been confirmed by the managers and teachers of some of the principal schools in Europe with whom I have had conversations—that the primary object of dramatic schools is not to turn out little tribes of actors and actresses modelled and moulded by hard-and-fast rules; on the contrary, the main aim is to give the students such a general education that, if in the course of training it should be found that they have no special aptitude for the dramatic calling, they may leave the school provided with so much general knowledge that they may embrace any other profession, and prove as capable in it as any man or woman who has received an ordinary high-class education. In fine, the Alpha and Omega of the system is to rear, before all, educated men and women, useful members of society. To obtain this result the students should be admitted when young; in fact, the school should be open to children from the age of thirteen. They would have to pass a preliminary examination, and must be efficient in writing, reading, grammar, geography, &c.; in short, in the various branches which constitute elementary education. If they prove backward, their admission must be deferred until they are more advanced. The school should be divided into five classes, the three lower ones of which are entirely preparatory. In these the students are to get a fair instruction in foreign languages, history, literature, geography, arithmetic, and mathematics. A few hours daily should be devoted to fencing, dancing, mimic and plastic exercises, and for the girls dressmaking; but the greater part of the time should be given to these elements of the dramatic art, reading aloud, diction, and spontaneous discourses upon given subjects, in order that the scholar may learn to express himself with freedom and let his brain perform, as it were, a kind of mental gymnastics. This exercise, I contend, is of the highest impor-

tance ; for the actor's calling is to endow other people's conceptions with the vitality of his own feelings and emotions, and nothing does more to stimulate the creative powers of an interpreter than the constant practice of expressing oneself in one's own way on a given subject.

When the three first classes have been passed, a preliminary examination takes place with a view to graduation to the higher classes, where the tuition of acting proper should begin. If, both by the teacher's report and the result of the actual examination, proof is afforded that a scholar has none of the qualifications which warrant a fair measure of achievement on the stage, the parents should be advised—but not compelled—to take their now about seventeen-year-old child away from the school and seek employment for it in some profession which seems more in accord with its abilities. Granted, however, that the examination be successful, the student goes into the fourth class, where, without excluding general education, he is prepared for the boards. At least six hours a week should be devoted to diction and acting on the special trial stage which must be connected with the school. Nor should the aspirants be allowed to appear in too ambitious parts. The great soliloquies of Shakespeare should be recited, not so much with a view to bringing out the acting power as to make the student understand the value of each sentence, of each word, the merits of the style and the method of speaking verse, with due observation of rhythm, euphony, and intonation. Acting should be confined to small plays, in which each character has an individual stamp, so that the student may have an opportunity of bringing out his peculiar gifts in a certain direction (*emploi*) ; then, detached scenes from great plays, in which many characters appear in small parts, as we find in Shakespeare in abundance, should be carefully rehearsed and acted. In this way the student would learn how to behave on the stage, when he has but to speak *at intervals*, or to act in thinking parts. In these exercises special care should be bestowed on attitude, position, demeanour, and facial expression. Besides this practical education the scholar should be initiated into the rules of æsthetics.

He should study with great care the history of costumes, the technique of the drama, the history of dramatic literature, and last, not least, the art of making up, and for this purpose actors or actresses who are considered past masters in this art should give practical lessons. At the end of the whole course the pupils of the highest class would have to submit to a semi-public examination. They would each have to recite a piece of poetry, and a soliloquy from a classical play; they would have to deliver spontaneously a small critical discourse on the outlines of a character in a classical play (for instance, Shakespeare's); and they would also appear in one or two small modern plays, to show how far they have already mastered the craft. Those who passed would leave the school with a diploma which would insure their immediate affiliation to—as we have no subsidised theatre yet—one or two of the more important theatres, for which purpose the co-operation of the principal managers would be indispensable.

The cry will naturally be raised that, in consequence of such a process, the profession would become even more overstocked than it is now, but this is a fallacy. The result of the establishment of a school supported by the leading managers, would be an immediate diminution of untrained, stage-struck aspirants, for they would learn soon enough that competition with certificated students would prove most difficult, on account of the managers drafting their fresh supplies from the school. On the other hand, the examinations, notably the examination in the third class, should be so rigorous, and the advice given to the incapable pupils to abandon a career for which they are not suitable, should be so earnest, that in the final classes nothing but really promising talent would remain to be developed. And, as regards the final examination, I have no fear whatever, for here the committee of patronage, which should be duly constituted of managers, actors of high standing, and competent critics, would sit in judgment and mercilessly put back all who, in diction or in mimicry, proved as yet unripe.

Now one word as to the organisation of the school. In the first place, I am emphatically of opinion that the management

and direction should be in as few hands as possible. There should be the committee of patronage to which I alluded before, but this should have no other object than to form the jury at the annual examination. The conduct of the school itself should be entrusted to one man, under the supervision of three others, say, an eminent actor, an actress of the influence and experience of Miss Terry, Mrs. Brancroft, or Mrs. Kendal, and a third person who would be neither an actor nor a playwright, but someone of a great general knowledge of art, literature and the drama. The manager of the school, I hold, should *not* be an actor. In politics we have seen that, in their capacities as ministers, non-specialists unfettered by particular knowledge, have proved the most efficient leaders of their respective departments. To take an example which bears on the immediate question, I would point out that the Dutch Dramatic School—which, in the nineteen years of its existence, has turned out, year after year, actors who have reached the highest rung of the ladder—has been led by Mr. Wilson, a gentleman who was originally Professor of Languages and Literature at one of the high schools at Amsterdam, and who had no other direct qualification for his post than a broad artistic instinct, a perfectly unbiassed mind, and an innate love of the drama, which he had studied from the other side of the footlights for years. At this juncture I dare not suggest any name, it might spoil the game in its initial stage; but that such a man could be easily found among Englishmen, goes without saying.

As regards the instruction at the school, one would have to look to the practical and unselfish support of some of the leading lights of the dramatic profession, such as is granted in Austria and in Holland. A capable stage manager should direct all the rehearsals. An artist like Mr. Alma-Tadema should teach the history of costumes. The history and literature of the drama, languages—in fact, all the branches—should be entrusted to specialists, so that a course of education might be obtained which should be absolutely efficient. Further comment on this point may be fitly reserved until these two great questions are settled;—on what basis will the dramatic school work? and

whence will it obtain its resources? For this is the crux of the question. If we want to establish a dramatic school, we must do it, not in a niggardly spirit, but with such ample means as will tide the establishment over the first five most difficult years of its existence. It is not sufficient to let the fate of the school depend upon the fees from the scholars. These fees, I suggest, should be low. They should be such, in fact, that children of humble parents could frequent the schools as well as those who are well-to-do; and it would be a very judicious course to establish a certain number of scholarships, in order that budding talent might not be left out in the cold for want of funds. It is generally said that, by co-operation of our principal managers, the school, if they want to have it, could be established in principle within a week, but I am by no means convinced that there is sufficient *esprit de corps* among them to justify any hope in this direction.

The question lies, therefore, in a nutshell. Is there a man or woman in England—for the State will do nothing, and joint-stock capitalisation is odious—who will do for the drama what will equal Mr. Tate's splendid munificence towards our pictorial art?

Not even as much is required. It is not a gift—not the perpetual sacrifice of a great sum of money—which I ask to accomplish the work I plead for. All that is needed is a man endowed with the instincts of Macænas, and sufficient wealth to part temporarily—say for ten years—with a sum of fifty thousand pounds, in order that the interest (at 4 per cent) should be employed to maintain the School of Dramatic Art, and to place it on a solid basis. If after ten years the institution were not self-supporting, it might go to limbo, and no more serious damage would have been done than that a rich man had devoted a slice of his yearly income to the sacred cause of art. While, failure or success, under any circumstances, the stage would have drawn many splendid recruits from the school which would produce its first contingent precisely five years after its foundation. But it is needless to dwell

upon the conditions of the gift, so long as the donor has not been found.

If the money is forthcoming, the establishment of the school is a matter of a few months, for crowds of juveniles are waiting for it. The very fact that the imperfect so-called dramatic schools which flourish in London are besieged by stage-struck young people, affords indisputable evidence in favour of this assertion.

But if no rich single-minded friend of the stage will put his shoulder to the wheel, I fear that words, arguments, and energy alike will be wasted, and that, for want of a proper school, the stage will continue to remain the happy hunting-ground for all sort and conditions of people who lack the very first essentials of an actor's-education.

THE CLUB BABY

May 1st. 1898.

I dreamed that I was present at a sitting of the

CENTRAL DRAMATIC COURT

(Before Mr. Justice Candour).

Lawrence Sterner and Edward G. Knoblauch, describing themselves as dramatic authors, and giving an address in the Northumberland Avenue, were tried before Mr. Justice Candour for having on April 27 abandoned a certain infant, nicknamed "The Club Baby," upon the stage of the Avenue Theatre, with felonious intent to expose the said infant to want, frost, and bodily harm.

Mr. Frank Blunt appeared to prosecute, and Mr. Deadhead, Q.C., duly briefed on behalf of the defendants, acted as their counsel.

Upwards of 250 witnesses, including many habitual frequenters of the pit and the gallery, and Mr. Clement Scott, who, on his re-appearance in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, had warmly espoused the cause of the accused, were called for the defence.

The prosecution abstained from calling any witnesses.

Mr. Blunt, in his opening statement for the prosecution, said that this was a very serious case indeed. The defendants were young gentlemen of a certain position and of means, and, although they had been educated to know better, they had wilfully and wantonly taken a little babe from the indispensable care of its mother, and had placed it in such a position upon the stage of the Avenue Theatre, that it must needs come to grief. In fact, but for the timely help of some charitably disposed persons, it

might have perished, thereby rendering the defendants liable to a verdict of murder. However, thanks to the efforts—counsel would almost call them superhuman efforts—of Mr. Lionel Brough, his son Sidney, Miss Vane Featherstone, Miss Beatrice Ferrar, Miss Susie Vaughan, Miss Clare Greet, and other able and well-meaning persons, disaster was avoided, and the child, although anæmic, half-starved, and bearing signs of ill-treatment, was saved. These efforts of the said ladies and gentlemen, all of whom belong to the honourable profession of the stage, were all the more laudable, since they had to submit to jests of an unrefined nature, to a clownish degradation unworthy of their talent and position, and, as far as the ladies were concerned, to a masquerade in men's clothes which was anything but pleasant to behold, in order to accomplish the work of salvation.

It would no doubt be urged by counsel on the other side that the defendants had only been guilty of a silly freak, that they meant no harm; that, if they had been interrogated at the proper time, these complications about the paternity of the child, which almost compromised such worthy gentlemen as Mr Sidney Brough and Mr. Lovell—the one a respectable fiancé—could have been satisfactorily explained. But, counsel concluded, this defence would not hold good at all; practical jokes, unless conceived with exquisite humour and executed with refinement, were very reprehensible; and, as in this case not only the child itself, but also the rescuers, would suffer severely from the consequences of defendants' deed, he hoped that the jury would unhesitatingly find a verdict that would meet the justice of the case.

Mr. Deadhead thereupon proceeded to call the witnesses, many of whom, under much pressure from the prosecution, admitted that they considered "The Club Baby," when it was rescued, a sore spectacle to behold; while others, evidently belonging to a class of people always pleased to be allowed inside a theatre, testified that they had "enjoyed the joke, and saw no "arm in it."

Counsel was about to call Mr. Clement Scott, of the *Daily Telegraph*, when

Mr. Blunt objected.

Mr. Deadhead : But Clement is an honourable man.

Mr. Blunt : Of course he is ; they are all honourable men—the contributors to the People's Paper ; but we don't want them. Mr. Scott, I contend, is not a reliable witness in this case ; he has only just lamely apologised for an insult to the dramatic profession, and since his presence at the Avenue was his first reappearance in the theatrical world, he would naturally side with the defendants, in order to atone for his forgiven but unforgotten offence.

The Judge : And, pray, who is Mr. Clement Scott ? (Laughter.)

Mr. Deadhead explained, whereupon Mr. Scott's evidence was ruled inadmissible in this case by the Judge.

Mr. Deadhead then warmly defended his clients, pleading youth, inexperience, folly, and craving for notoriety. He adjured the jury not to blight the future of these young men by giving a verdict of guilty, which would mean disgrace and ruin.

The Judge having summed up, the jury, without leaving the box, gave a verdict of guilty, strongly recommending the prisoners to mercy.

In passing sentence the Judge said :

Lawrence Sterner and Eduard G. Knoblauch, you have been convicted of an offence which I cannot pass over lightly. You have taken an infant from the breast of its mother and abandoned it to the mercy of a cruel world ; you have exposed others to ridicule, to humiliation—aye, to trouble and possibly to loss. I am not at all sure that it is not my duty to visit upon you the entire severity of the law, and to commit you to hard labour. But I prefer to err on the side of leniency, and, having heard the eloquent words of your counsel, who pleaded your youth and inexperience as extenuating circumstances, having also regard to the fact that you will be heavily mulcted in the compensation of the child's parents and its rescuers, my sentence is that you be bound over to keep the peace towards all Her Majesty's subjects for *twelve months*, and that you bear all the costs connected with the prosecution.

(Voices in Court: Hear, hear, and applause, which was immediately suppressed.)

But the familiar clapping broke the spell of my slumber, and as I was rubbing my eyes—for Oh! the play had been so tedious—I praised the impartial judge, who restrained Messrs. Sterner and Knoblauch from play-writing for an entire twelvemonth.

THE MEDICINE MAN

8 May 1898.

'The Lyceum is the theatre of mysteries.

For years its doors were barred against the living, and when at last they gave way to pressure and to parley, who should come in? Merivale, Comyns Carr, Lawrence Irving! while Pine-ro, Jones, Grundy, Carton were left out in the cold, and Bernard Shaw was excommunicated.

And now the standard bearers of "Literature", captured soon after the establishment of this paper under the ægis of *The Times*, have been accorded precedence over better men, although nothing warranted their choice, for they were entire strangers to the stage, and the result has been disastrous.

I have nothing to do with personalities; I understand that Mr. Traill is one of the wittiest and most erudite men in London; I have enjoyed Mr. Hichen's clever "Green Carnation," and I have admired the flight of his fancy in "Flames" and other work of his, and nothing would have pleased me more than to hail their *coup d'essai* as a *coup de maître*; but for the sake of the modern drama I cannot help regretting that they were preferred to more experienced craftsmen. For now, it may be safely assumed, the dead and the fossils will again resume their sway at the Lyceum.

What, then, was the mainspring of the failure? How came it to pass that, after the curtain's fall, the unfamiliar sound of hissing intermingled with the boisterous hosannahs of the blindly faithful?

The riddle is easy to solve. Want of grip—the magic gift which makes the dramatist—was one of the causes. The other was inexperience combined with the authors' inability to grapple with the magnitude of their theme. Even now, after having

calmly reflected on the five acts with their profusion of speech, their great variety of incidents, their multitude of characters, character sketches, and phantom-like fleeting figures, I am at a loss to understand what the authors were driving at.

Was Doctor Tregenna, hypnotist, specialist, vivisectionist of the mind, a friend or merely a victim of his own occult sciences? He was, so we are told, once crossed in love, and when, twenty years after, he meets the daughter of the woman who was the cause of his lifelong loneliness, he contrived a scheme which is truly diabolical in its fiendishness. He knew that the mother, an impressionable woman, was deranged in her mind, and on the strength of this knowledge he convinces first the father, and then the girl herself, that she is in need of rest and treatment under his care at his retreat. But we on the other side are not at all convinced. We see before us a healthy girl, full of fancies, full of love, perhaps a trifle inclined to morbid thoughts—easily explained on pathological grounds in the bloom of youth—and as healthy in body and soul as one could wish. But this girl—like many others—is susceptible to the mystic charm of the Doctor's weird personality and the fascination of his eyes. She becomes in his hands a creature without will, an automaton; she follows him to the Retreat, she renounces her lover and her father, she is as much the medicine man's plaything as is the hideous dipsomaniac whom he has captured in a place called University House, Whitechapel—the merest caricature, to put it mildly, of mission-work in London's East.

And now that he has her in his power, *un cadavre entre les mains de ses supérieurs*, as strictly as the Jesuit doctrines would desire it, what does he want with her? Her love? Her youth? Her perdition? The query remains, but the answer is in default; there are indications that he desires her love, but they lead to nothing but words. At length, when the Doctor learns that the mother had not been tricked away from him by the nobleman she married, he repents and releases the girl from the spell of his power. She goes with her father and the man of her choice; and the doctor, whose magnet seems to have exhausted itself in this supreme effort, falls a prey to the murderous lust

and the revenge of the drink-sodden brute upon whom he loved to practice his theories. A hideous end of melodramatic ghastliness.

The authors, the editors of "Literature," call this a "melodramatic comedy." Is it grim humour, fumisterie, or ignorance? However, what does the description matter? The evolution is the thing, and this is entirely at fault. The theme in itself is not very interesting, for it is neither novel nor ingenious. The whole story is like a mountain of impossibilities, built upon a molehill of improbability. We—who are not raw amateurs at play-going—saw from the first scene in the second act what was going to happen, and that discounted our curiosity, although the first act, of which men like Arthur Morrison or Maugham (Liza, of Lambeth), or St. John Adcock, who really know the East-End, could have made a masterpiece, had interested us in spite of its entire misconception of Whitechapel manners. But when gradually the action began to move, slowly, heavily, painfully—clumsy as a steam roller, instead of swift like a locomotive—when the drama was hampered by words, and padded by that light sort of society-cackle, of which Oscar Wilde was a past-master and our authors are but poor imitators, interest flagged entirely. I repeat, the thing failed to grip, for the authors were not able to master their task. It was melodramatic comedy indeed—therefore neither the one nor the other; we did not feel tickled to a hearty laugh, nor did we feel the shivers—the wonderful shivers of dear old impossible melodrama—tingling our skin; nor did our heart leap into our throat, as in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." And so the play, with its horrors and its fine speeches, its live canaries in "The Retreat," and almost superhuman Mephistophelian medicine man, its talking mannikins, and innumerable "enters" and "exits," slowly fizzled out like a dying candle; and, when it was all over, a sad shrugging of the shoulders and a sorrowful *cui bono?* was the most lenient, and at the same time the most eloquent, verdict of those who left the dismal playhouse.

It would be unfair to thrust the whole burden of the failure upon the shoulders of the luckless authors. Entire justice has not

been done to the play, and if I affirm its falling short as a drama, I am by no means prepared to pronounce a judgment upon the rhythmic qualities of the dialogue. From the first there was "death in the house." Everybody was nervous—as nervous as soldiers marching to certain defeat. Even the Chief was not himself, and therefore was less distinct, or, I should say, more indistinct, than usual. Yet his performance deserves admiration, for he alone held the play. His appearance, it goes without saying, was not only impressive, but it had that air of mysticism which was the groundwork of the character. That he was more virtuoso than man of medicine was a mere capillarian detail; and no one, I feel sure, would require our leading actor-manager to shear his locks, when we pass over young actors' moustaches in classical plays without a murmur.

In the important scenes of the play Sir Henry held his somewhat recalcitrant public by his voice, his force, and his facial play, which was remarkable; and altogether Dr. Tregenna, without being a "bravour"-part of Irving, will take rank in his gallery of portraits in the vicinity of his Mathias in "The Bells."

Miss Ellen Terry, a dream of youth on the stage, endeavoured to vanquish her nervousness, but hardly succeeded; she was very winning as the weak-headed girl, but somehow her performance was strained. It was an uneven battle between the woman, the actress, and the emotions of an inauspicious first night.

Mr. Macintosh—as the drunken Burge—gave a picture of dipsomania and its trail of violence, which was intensely horrible, and sometimes pathetic. Unfortunately he laid on the colours to such an extent that intended naturalism gave way to grotesqueness.

So far Mr. Charles Warner ("Coupeau," in "L'Assommoir") is the only English actor who has succeeded in enacting the terrible tragedy of alcoholism. It would be tedious and of no avail to criticise at length an extensive list of actors, all of whom were no doubt full of good intentions, although nobody seemed to feel particularly inspired or well at ease. *En passant* I should pay my tribute to Mr. Norman Forbes, who portrayed a namby-

pamby clergyman with naïve simplicity, and impress upon Miss Vynor that unrest of deportment, which becomes magnified in the glare of the stage, is a fault which a young actress should fight against with all her might. If we had an academy, I should earnestly beg her to follow Hamlet's advice to Ophelia—with the modification warranted by the occasion. But to many other actors who appear in this performance, the same counsel would apply. Sometimes consummate acting will save a bad play. Unfortunately not even this godsend was vouchsafed to the ill-starred "Medicine Man." The play foundered quietly, respectably, like a leaky craft; and, when the waters had closed over the wreck, there remained nothing but to pity the poor people on shore, who, as usual, "were bidden on the stage after the performance" to console the Chief with doleful congratulations.

THE AMBASSADOR.

June 5. 1898.

A new writer has swelled the ranks of our dramatists in the person of Mrs. Craigie. Her advent was long promised; her brilliant string of novels was but a preparation for her ultimate goal, the conquest of the stage. And now that she has come, now that her firstling has stood the test of materialisation in the focus of the footlights, it is a joy to hail her as one of the few upon whom the reputation of our drama will rest in the future. Mrs. Craigie's undoubted gift for dramatic work was apparent from the first; I remember that in those sultry days of struggle, when I fought the battle of dramatic "Independence," she was one of the few upon whom my hopes were founded. But my pleadings were in vain; Mrs. Craigie with characteristic modesty, although her writings towered above the average, declared that her powers were not yet ripe enough to justify a venture upon the slippery boards; she would wait and see and study, and then, perhaps.....

Five or six years have passed, and with the exception of one clever little play dedicated to Ellen Terry, the stage has had nothing from the authoress beyond her promise. But the stage is a fascinating creature; once in her toils there is no use for subterfuge or flight, she will be obeyed, and Mrs. Craigie, still diffident, no doubt, had to capitulate like the rest. She need not grieve over that, for the comedy which was presented at the St. James' Theatre with the sumptuousness worthy of so clever an effort, should certainly be the forerunner of a prosperous career in the dramatic field.

In one quality in particular "The Ambassador," imperfect though the play may be as a whole, proves a formidable rival

to the average home-made play ; it is the offspring of an exquisitely graceful pen, it is prose of the finest quality, it is the work of an artist. So much so, indeed, that the artist, scornful of *métier*, of routine, of convention, has entirely disregarded the exigencies of craft and built her delightful edifice upon a basis of the slightest description. In less dexterous hands a play so slender in conception and so meagre in plot as "The Ambassador" would have tumbled to pieces ; but Mrs. Craigie's wit and the charm of her language succeed in maintaining the balance ; and if we feel all along that there is not much fibre in her material—that there is more varnish than colour, we cannot deny the fascination.

It is the story of Benedick again, round which Mrs. Craigie has woven her romance. Her hero, Lord St. Aubyn, has courted many women in his time ; he was once even on the point of offering his hand to a charming widow, Lady Beauvedere ; but the heart has remained vacant, and he has already entered the ominous portals of middle-age when he meets the enchantress. She, Juliet Gainsborough, a girl delightful in her youthful beauty, is not free at that moment, she is engaged to Lady Beauvedere's step-son William, a cold and correct diplomatist, who promises to be an exquisite fossil some day. Why she has accepted him is not quite clear, and as her *fiancé's* relations look upon her as an intruder, we can well conceive that she yearns to break the bonds. The *coup de foudre* does it ; Lord St. Aubyn is struck at first sight, and she, too, feels at once that he is the man of her choice. And now the play proceeds slowly, too slowly at times, to remove the obstacles and to weld these two loving souls together. There are complications, for in no four-act play would true love run quite smoothly ; to save a young feather-brain from disgrace, and to rescue a cheque which he has forged, the lovely Juliet does not fear to risk her reputation by a visit to bachelor's quarters ; but when she is discovered by Lord St. Aubyn there is no commonplace scene of jealousy and suspicion. Mrs. Craigie's hero is no mere theatrical puppet—he is a man of good heart and common sense ; and, instead of raising a storm, he believes in the purity

of Juliet's motives and loves her all the more for her innocent escapade.

There are other incidents, collateral to the action, of little import, but amusing; for instance the love-affair of Juliet's ex-fiancé and the girl with whom he has grown up from boyhood—and never was there conceived such a comical and frigid declaration of love in the whole of the modern English drama; and again, the scene in which Lady Beauvedere reminds Lord Aubyn of their ertswhile mutual affection. But it is unfair to pull these leaves from the branch, as they do not further the object of criticism, and, possibly, tend to deal unjustly with the authoress. For the strength of the play lies in the dialogue; and in its strength lies its weakness. The talk is admirable; since Oscar Wilde's untimely ended vogue, no such fusilade of witty epigrams has resounded on the boards. But where John Oliver Hobbes is infinitely the superior of the author of "Lady Windermere's Fan" is in the quality of this linguistic firework. His was a brilliant, but manufactured article, and not rarely copied from Masters beyond the Straits of Dover; in "The Ambassador" the sparks seem to spring right from a glowing furnace. Our authoress is an observer, a satirist of the first water, and in what she says, the mind alone is not suzerain; the heart too raises its voice, and there are lines which I would fain copy, so absolutely do they express in a few words a wealth of true feeling.

Where Mrs. Craigie errs in this first attempt is in exuberance and in unfamiliarity with the optics of the stage. Her mind is so full, her imagination is so vivid, that they defy all control. Hence scenes which are spun out to inordinate length; hence also the impression that the characters are deficient in backbone, because they are overflowing with talk. But this can be remedied; if the blue pencil were rigorously used in the first two acts, which drag considerably, a marvellous change would probably be observed; and those who were on the first night loud in their complaints of "flimsiness", would see that there is a good deal more strength in the principal personages than was apparent on that occasion. For all that, the main ob-

jection stands—that the story is not strong enough to carry four acts; and so long as our public, which is fond of action and intense climax, is not educated up to the enjoyment of brilliant dialogue unsupported by complicated incidents, I fear that sweet and slender plays like “The Ambassador,” however well told, will succumb in the competition with heavier fare. If this were not a promising firstling, I might feel tempted to enumerate other faults of minor-importance, notably in the analysis of the main character, who strikes me as somewhat too light-hearted, too jaunty for so grave and important a personage as a British ambassador. I might also point out that the title of the play is more adroitly than correctly chosen, for Lord St. Aubyn has all the characteristics of an ordinary man and very few of those of a diplomatist; but I will not insist, lest the hearty praise due to Mrs. Craigie should be overshadowed by too exacting criticism.

A good many of the shortcomings might have been effaced by better acting than that we saw last Thursday. Making due allowance for nervousness on the part of some, and discomfort in others (because they had to live in a world of which they know little except by hearsay), I cannot spare the general remark that the performance lacked spirit. To put it fine, it was brainless—from the parrot-like cackle of the society dames to the more ambitious efforts of Mr. George Alexander and Miss Fay Davis. Only three of the actors displayed true feeling and intelligence. They were Mr. Esmond, pathetic as the young scapegrace; Mr. H. B. Irving, who improves with every new part, and gave a wonderful portrait of a rigid and fish-blooded young “Foreign Officer”; and Miss Hilda Rivers, whose typical Society lady was an ungrateful but highly interesting achievement. But Mr. Alexander, in spite of all his endeavours to be courtly, fluent, humorous, sincere, never came near the real meaning of the part. His voice, always apt to be monotonous, became unnatural when it attempted to sound the note of gaiety or the chord of tenderness. Frankly, there was nothing in this somewhat obsequious and would-be brilliant *vieux garçon* to warrant the romance of love at first sight; and his demeanour, however pleas-

ing it may be to some, never conveyed to me the grace and the tactful refinement of high breeding.

I feel that I stand almost alone in saying this, and also in the remarks which I am about to pass on Miss Davis' acting; but then, the combination acting-manager and leading lady is not synonymous with "praise and compliments" in my dramatic dictionary, and I consider it my duty not to spare the leaders of the profession, when others are always ready to belaud them *quand même*, and to criticise the smaller fry alone with unrestricted candour. Miss Fay Davis, then, who is a charming *ingénue*, and has in the past filled several smaller parts to perfection, has been called to a position superior to her talent. She has much natural sweetness; she has a dainty girlish personality; she has a tender little note in her voice, and a manner which is for a while entirely prepossessing. But there her endowments end, and as soon as she is seen in fresh parts in rapid succession, her limitations become evident. Her range is small; her voice is not able to express deep emotions; her American intonations are jarring; her conception lacks variety, and her diction is always so demure and so curiously childlike, that one begins to look upon it as an affectation. In "The Ambassadors" this struck me in particular, it was no doubt a sweet performance—a delicate piece of china on a bibelot-table—but there was no real warmth, no strength and no vitality in it. At best, Miss Davis appeared in her pink frock like a little governess who was honoured by the advances of her master; and surely, when the authoress drew the character of Juliet Gainsborough, she had in her mind a woman of a different stamp—simple, if you like, but not so self-effacing that she would say, as it were, "Pray excuse my existence." There are women on our stage who would have played this part as charmingly as Miss Davis, and certainly with far more power; and I, for one, shall not cease regretting that here and in other theatres our own actresses are so quickly driven into the background, in order to make room for more or less talented newcomers, mostly from America.

There is no need to deal with the other members of the

company, since none of them excelled, and none were too obviously ill-suited to their *rôles*; it was altogether a somewhat spiritless performance, which would have seriously hampered a less interesting play. The undoubted success which was achieved belongs, therefore, entirely to Mrs. Craigie; and thanks to her only this ambassador will soon become a *persona grata* at St. James's.

PELLEAS AND MELISANDE.

June 26. 1898.

The style of Maurice Maeterlinck lends itself particularly to caricature, and his method in its infantile simplicity is an easy prey to ridicule. Hence from the first moment his work became known in England, every tenth-rate professional humorist had his fling at the young writer, and even the poet Comyns Carr, who has every reason to be careful of his glass house, courted the applause of a crowd, to whom Maeterlinck's name was but a cipher, at the expense of his talented colleague, by calling him "a very Belgian Shakespeare." And on this—on this alone—will rest the Herostratic immortality of Joseph Comyns Carr. The others, not so happy in their pandering to the facile laughter of the vulgar, have been less successful in holding Maeterlinck up to ridicule and contempt, but Mr. Carr has succeeded beyond all dreams: the great British public contemns Maeterlinck, for that he is "a very Belgian Shakespeare."

It is sad indeed that one stupid jibe, coming from the lips of one who is alleged to be a man of taste, should thus jeopardise the prospects of a prosperous career on our stage, and instil prejudice into the mind of our impressionable but well-meaning public. For the creations of Maeterlinck are worthy of reverence and of earnest contemplation; they are the product of a highly sensitive and deeply poetic mind, powerfully assisted by an eye which sees an ideal world in surroundings of exquisite beauty. There is, in fact, no French writer of our days who succeeds, with such simplicity of material, in obtaining such marvellous effects, and there is scarcely a French poet whose verse equals Maeterlinck's prose in the rhythm, the cadence, the music of its language.

If one is deaf to this, or, like Messrs. Carr and Alfred E. T.

Watson here, and Francisque Sarcey in Paris, unwilling to understand it, then all arguments are futile. Time must do its work, as it has done it for Wagner, for Burne-Jones, and Whistler.

I freely admit that at the first glance there is some temptation to brush these plays of Maeterlinck's aside, and to laugh at the peculiarities of the dialogue, as if it were Ollendorf's well-known phraseology pressed into the service of the drama. But one has no right to treat so lightly the work of one who is as earnest an artist as ever lived, and, in spite of his early celebrity, a model of modesty into the bargain. Laughter is a poor but easy weapon, for from the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step. And no one single superficial reading, with which most people are content, will disclose the beauty and the charm of these prose poems, which would seem absolutely undramatic in their primitive workmanship and their fragmentary construction. Yet simple as the touching love-story of Pelleas and his sister-in-law Mélisande may be, it is full of pathos, and when the pictures are vivified by actors who understand how to chant the sweet-flowing French lines, as Lugné-Poë and Suzanne Desprès understood it, when they gave their wonderful, well-nigh ethereal performances at the Opera Comique, an audience must be entirely devoid of artistic feeling if it be not captivated by the beauty of the thing.

But take this texture, strip it of its French delicacy and harmony, force it into the robust frame of the English language, and all vanishes—pathos, charm, and all.

I am not going to say that Mr. Mackail has done his work badly—although one unpardonable sin of translation almost throttled the play at the very moment when it had overpowered the audience, for our Londoners are never so deeply engrossed but that they will guffaw at the slightest provocation; but the task of the translator was hopeless from the outset, and the attempt was almost akin to sacrilege. Truly, if the beauty of the spectacle, the evident earnestness of Mr. Forbes Robertson to present the work with all the grace and splendour money can command, had not soothed my dismay at the woeful linguistic

degradation of a fine foreign work, I should have condemned the whole undertaking. But there was so much for the eye to feast upon, the performance was such a galaxy of pre-Raphaelite pictorial beauty, that all shortcomings paled, and I for one left the playhouse in a grateful mood.

Still, the truth must be told; as a drama "*Pelleas and Mélisande*" made an unsatisfactory impression, partly because Maeterlinck has in this early work failed to master the technical exigencies of the stage, but particularly because from beginning to end the actors—with the sole exception of Mr. Martin Harvey—stood in direct opposition to the meaning and the rhythm of the work. They all acted as if this were an ordinary costume play peopled with characters of flesh and blood, instead of a delicate fancy belonging to a dreamland where the figures are almost phantom-like and the voices low and mystic, like the rustle of leaves gently undulated by a soft breeze. The French actors realised this; they exhibited no solid scenes of intense colouring and massive decorations—their stage was veiled with gauze, the footlights were extinguished, the scenic material was scanty and of the slightest, the characters floated as it were before our eyes in an atmosphere of haze, and the words rippled from their lips in chanting cadence, as if a choir were reciting a psalm in the distance. Thus the illusion and enchantment were complete.

But Mr. Forbes Robertson, fine and manly, and even magnificent, as he was in his outbursts of passion, was not the Goland of our dreamland; and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, although she looked a picture, and endeavoured to be less neurotic and more comely and suave than is her wont, never realised the ethereal nature of the loveable *Mélisande*. It was good acting in its way, but it jarred in its somewhat robust method against the frailty of the poet's conceit. Mr. Martin Harvey alone—I am glad to be able to pay this tribute to this young artiste, one of the few who take their calling seriously—came within measurable distance of the ideal conception. His *Pelleas* was a poetic creation, tender to a fault, almost girlish in its innocence; but it was in the right key, if

only French had been his vehicle instead of the unmelodious translation of Mr. Mackail.

The ladies and gentlemen who surrounded the chief exponents endeavoured to maintain what there was left of poetic atmosphere, but only one attracted my attention, and he had but two words to say. It was Mr. Frank Dyall as the Doctor, who watched at Mélisande's deathbed—but these two words were given with a wealth of meaning, and his demeanour was unspeakably eloquent. Mr. Dyall is an artist whom I, if I were a manager, would welcome to my service.

The music of Mr. Gabriel Fauré was almost drowned in darkness and in the irreverent prattle of countless *matinée* hats, but what I heard of it was wonderfully aptly wedded to the French lines, many of which I could whisper to the strains with intense delight at the perfect harmony. The experiment was altogether deeply interesting, and will tend to defeat the silly detractors of that true poet, Maurice Maeterlinck; it was from first to last a thing of beauty, and, had it not been for the maltreatment of the text, it would dwell in our memory as a joy for ever.

RAGGED ROBIN.

June 26. 1898.

It is not as a dramatist that Jean Richepin's name will be handed down to posterity. His success on the stage has never been complete—not even in those fervid days when his soul was all aglow for the divine Sarah, and when he acted by her side in his own "Nana-Sahib." But Jean Richepin is one of the poets of whom modern France may be proud, and so vivid is the flight of his imagination, so bewitching the magic of his language, that he succeeds in rendering the tritest dramatic theme acceptable, in spite of the action and characterisation being overwhelmed by the cascading continuity of his alexandrines. His dramatic creations belong essentially to the realm of poetry, and once they are transplanted into the less fanciful dominion of prose, the flimsiness of their foundation becomes so palpable, that the plays sink to the level of much ado about next to nothing.

It is therefore risky, it is unwise, it seems almost unfair, to surrender a play like "Le Chemineau" into the hands of an adapter in prose; if the play be translatable at all—and I fear we in England are not sufficiently accustomed to poetic plays to hear them with unalloyed joy—a poet, a great poet, should undertake the task, for he alone could enter into the spirit of the work. Mr. Louis Napoleon Parker was, therefore, placed at a disadvantage when Mr. Tree commissioned him to remould Richepin's beautiful verse into dialect prose, and it would be idle to blame him for the shortcomings of his version, or to assure him that it bears comparison with its exalted model. That he has loyally done his best, that within the limits of his mastery of language he has endeavoured to avoid banalities and to ally grace of form with well chosen words, I con-

cede without reserve ; but the Dorsetshire dialect does not embellish the quality of his prose, nor can I say that the play in its novel form was engrossing or throughout even interesting. The din of a constant yearning for poesy clamoured in my ears, in every scene, in every situation ; for nothing but verse will reconcile us to the sordidness of the story, and particularly of the hero, a tramp, a vagabond and a scoundrel to boot, who seduces and leaves a loving country girl, and after twenty years of neglect, when hazard brings him face to face with her again and the love-child she bore him, nestles cosily in her husband's home, until his innate craving for the highway drives him onward once more. This is the whole story in a nutshell, and if one pauses to analyse it, it is neither pretty nor sympathetic. What saves it to a certain extent is the rural atmosphere, the sweetness of the woman, the manliness of the youth, and the never-failing influence of the *voix du sang*, which was so dear to the French dramatists of the fifties and sixties. Moreover, in French, the delightful Bohemianism of the tramp and the charm of his poetic utterance softened the inherent unpleasantness of the story—it condoned the vice, the rags, the tatters, and the dirt of the homeless wanderer. But in this prose-idyll these unenviable attributes of the wayfarer came unpleasantly to the fore ; a love-story unadorned by cleanliness demands idealisation, and no prose, however well cadenced, will remove the unpleasant reality.

Again, the action, as unfolded in Mr. Parker's adaptation, drags sometimes to exasperation, and the fourth (original fifth) act, as we saw it at Her Majesty's, with the endless death-scene of the man, after Ragged Robin's erstwhile love had married, was so painful and yet so barren of all true pathos, that at the curtain's fall the public was at first scarcely enthusiastic. Decidedly Mr. Parker is not happy in his endings ; in nearly all his plays the last act falls flat ; so in "Rosemary," so in "The Bohemian," so in "The Vagabond King," to quote a few ; and this goes a long way to explain why his work has little vitality. In order to live, a play must end better than it begins. And in Mr. Parker's repertoire precisely the reverse is ever the case.

Mr. Beerbohm Tree has lavished on this play a picturesqueness and beauty of setting which must have gladdened the heart of Jean Richepin as he watched the performance from a box. The cast, too, which was engaged to interpret the drama, does the manager credit. Mr. Charles Warner, first and foremost, scored the triumph of the evening. His youthful gaiety in the first act, his picture of senility in the second act, were a highly interesting contrast. But in the end of that act his acting touched grandeur. He had to impersonate the husband of Ragged Robin's maid, Alison; when the old man hears that his son is a child of chance and not his own, he is stricken by apoplexy. The scene is horrible, and there is room for protest against its introduction, but the actor deserves the highest praise. With consummate power he expresses the destruction of his vitality; he shakes from top to toe, his every muscle quivers, and he stretches in ghastly rigidity. It was magnificent, and the house vibrated with emotion and enthusiasm. It was the apotheosis of the so-called "old-school" of acting, from which the new has so much to learn.

Mr. Franklin Macleay, as an old superstitious farmer, added also to his laurels. His make-up, his diction, his deportment,—all were of a piece, artistic. Mr. Waller and Miss Millard had but small parts, but, needless to say, they were interesting; while, next to the clever types of peasantry of Messrs. du Maurier and Percival Stevens, the comely barmaid of Miss Rhoda Halkett deserves special commendation. It was a delightfully sunny impersonation; and when the moment came to sound a note of feeling—a single line or so only—Miss Halkett was so sincere and so intense in her facial expression that she lifted her little part into prominence. After so much proof of competence, Miss Halkett should be entrusted with more important parts; she has a good deal more in her than many much belauded leading ladies. Mrs. Tree, I regret to say, was, in spite of all attempts to be natural as Alison, by no means a real unsophisticated Dorset girl. The lady, the grand dame, was evident at every moment, and as she struggled with the dialect, the air of unreality of her perform-

ance became all the more apparent. The part is unsuited to her, and should have been given to Miss Lily Hanbury, who has a far greater command of pathos. Nor can I offer Mr. Beerbohm Tree my congratulations on his latest creation. As he played and failed to grip me, Sir Henry Irving's grand art was unremittingly before my eyes. He is the Ragged Robin of the poem, he possesses all that Beerbohm Tree lacks; and as I pondered what Irving would have done with such a part, I was dismayed to remember that some blind partisans of the younger manager would actually fain dethrone the acknowledged king of the dramatic profession, "because he is getting old," and drape the purple on the shoulder of Beerbohm Tree. He is undoubtedly an actor of great intelligence, and apparently he dives into the very depths of his parts—for the details are masterly, and his gestures are sometimes of great dexterity—but the soul is wanting; he enters into the skin, but not into the vitals; he always remains Tree, clever, quick at repartee, agile, "beau phraseur, beau sabreur," but there is no heart under it all. Here was a character which should have drawn tears in the great scene, when the lover meets the forsaken woman, when the father meets the offspring of his youthful passion; but, picturesquely as he played it, the heart did not beat louder. It was acting, not living.

And this want of sincerity pervaded his entire performance. His make-up resembled a closely cropped Svengali, and like Svengali he acted the part; thus he was not a careless, natural, fanciful roadside loungeur with much humour and more waywardness in his composition, but an adventurer of the conventional type—too well-mannered to be genuine, too self-conscious to be natural. In the third act, where in a jocular sort of way Robin tries to bewitch an old peasant—a scene in which Mr. Tree's little slaps on the old man's head and body reminded me of the "Two Macs"—the actor hardly addressed his victim; holding the middle of the stage, he played to the crowd, as if there were no play, but merely one person for whom alone the whole thing was organised. Such acting is, in my estimation, far from beautiful.

That there were fine moments in Mr. Tree's Ragged Robin goes without saying; he was often humorous and always full of verve and vivacity; but, measuring the actor by the high standard warranted by his position, his latest creation cannot be pronounced a success. Yet even this comparative failure will be no cause for regret, if it will hold up the mirror to Mr. Tree and convince him that real greatness in acting can only be achieved by entire disregard of self and absolute subservience to the harmony of the dramatic picture.

THREE MAGICIANS.

SARAH, DUMAS FILS, AND FEUILLET.

July 3. 1898.

Dumas, in "*La Femme de Claude*," advocating his famous *Tue la!*; Octave Feuillet, his literary kinsman, rigorously upholding a *Tue le!* in "*Julie*"; and Sarah, the divine, espousing the cause of both by lending the power of her genius to the complex characters of the two women,—is it not enough to cause one to fly far from the madding crowd, and to write in the stillness of Nature, and in long hours of leisure, a book worthy of three subjects so vast and so interesting? But I must buckle with time and space and endeavour to say in this small compass what I would fain discuss at length.

Both plays are models of simple construction; both evolve an intense tragedy in the lives of three people; both end violently with the death of the guilty woman; both are pictures of the decay of French homelife in the latter part of this century. The affinity of "*La Femme de Claude*" and of "*Julie*" does not end here. The same views of life are taken by Dumas and Feuillet; their very style is of fraternal mould; and if the former is an advocate-preacher of great prolixity, Feuillet, too, cherishes the preaching of sermons, although the fountain of his thoughts is less bountiful, and therefore flows less voluminously than the stream from Dumas' pen.

The effect again is the same. The two Academicians were about equal masters of their language, and they wielded it with magic power. It is no use rebelling from the first against the logic of their theses; the glib tongue is overwhelming; for a time at least one is inclined to bow to their arguments. The disenchantment comes later, when the lights are low and the fresh air enfranchises the bewildered mind. Then we begin to analyse

and to discern the fallacies propounded by our authors. "Kill her!" It is very well when we behold a monster like Cesarine, who, in her greed, her lust, her innate corruptness of body and of soul, would betray husband, lover, and Fatherland—but the woman and her surroundings are all false. Such people as Dumas created do not live; they are but materialised figments of his special pleading—the plea of death *sans phrase* to the guilty woman.

There is more to say in defense of the "Kill him!" in the less known play "Julie." Here the picture is less distorted, the characters are more lifelike. The preacher and the pleader lurk behind them all, but they are more discreet; the story of Julie is, alas! one which does not entirely belong to the fantasy of the author. She is a woman who deserves our commiseration; she has been a loyal wife, an excellent mother for years, while her husband, steeped in the principles which render so many French marriages hopeless wrecks, has remained a stranger to her. He seeks his pleasures outside, keeps mistresses, makes no effort to penetrate into that warm womanly heart that would be his, if he would but take it. In that lonesomeness the wife is imperceptibly drawn into a dangerous path; for her husband has a friend, a man well in the thirties, lonely like herself; he loves her in silence. But neither would yield—the friend even upbraids the husband for his conduct with a frankness bordering on brutality. But when the ignominy is forced on her to receive as a friend and neighbour one of her husband's mistresses, her battle is lost. She repays infidelity with infidelity—love has overpowered her. Then comes the doom. The daughter of the guilty mother—a sweet little girl of seventeen—loses her young heart; she loves her mother's lover. The position grows insufferable and he departs. Julie is heart-broken. But worse is to come; the mother had discouraged her daughter's affection for a man "who was tied for life to another woman"; the husband learns this and scents mischief. By stratagem he forces her to confess her guilt, and in the supreme excitement of the scene the woman is killed by the failure of the heart's action. At that moment the lover returns,

and the husband meets him with the terrible threat: "I will kill you!"

The baldness of my tale can do no justice to the play; it can but demonstrate with how much dexterity Feuillet has forced three great themes into one picture. There are scenes of such power that only lengthy excerpts could do them justice; one of the finest is the last but one, in which the wife depicts the failure of her married life. Feuillet has never written another page so true, so concise, so palpitating with real emotion; it is a woman's heart laid bare, it is a life story summarised in a score of lines. Yet the tragedy does not cross the footlights any more than that of "La Femme de Claude," for the author has baulked the issue of his problem. The death of Julie was a convenient artifice to solve the knot—as convenient as the evanescence of some of Brownings's *dramatis personæ*: it remains a case of "not proven," for the real crux of the question was, what would have happened if the woman had remained alive? Nor does cool reflection admit that such a husband as Julie's had a right to "kill him." Or if he had the right by convention, he had forfeited it by his own conduct. We cannot feel sympathy for the man, but we do deeply sympathise with the woman, a sinner, yes, but so deeply wronged, so brave a struggler. And thus we turn away dissatisfied; we have listened with interest, but without emotion; and when the echo of the words—the beautiful words—has died away, our mind is full of discords; full, too, of dismay, for these six acts of "La Femme de Claude" and of "Julie" are a moral swamp, in which all our ideas of marital felicity are begrimed with foulness.

Heaven knows how the play would have fared without the genius of Sarah, for neither was a success in Paris at the "Gymnase" and at the "Comédie Française."

But Sarah is as great a magician in her way as the authors are in the use of words. When she is at her best she can save any cause, even the most hopeless. And this year she plays better than ever. True, the autumn of life has alloyed base metal with the erstwhile pure gold of her voice; it is less tender, less be-

witching than it was, but her other powers have increased. Her method is no longer purely impulsive, or, rather, explosive, as I would like to call it. Nor does she at times sink into periods of apathy as formerly. She is more even now. The fervor of her passion has lost none of its intensity, but it grows gradually, and when the climax comes—those wonderful moments when all her being is ablaze, when she is entirely lost as it were in her assumed character—it strikes home with peerless force. She has reached, I venture to say, the zenith of her career, for now she has done with star-acting and episodical bravura; she has become a harmonious part of the picture, and that is, as I contend, the very essential of great acting. Her impersonations of Cesarine and Julie, two characters so different and so subtle, so varied and so forcible, will add a fresh wreath to her never-fading laurels, not only for what she did but for the opportunities she gave to others. It is rare that a travelling company brings us such talented players as M. Deval (Claude), M. Bremont (Julie's husband), and Mdle. Berthilda, who played the sweet daughter of Julie. They all deserve more than ordinary praise, but whom I would single out from all the lesser lights is M. Chameroy, who had the thankless part of the *raisonneur* Cantagnac in "La Femme de Claude." He had to pronounce in the first act one speech of well-nigh three pages; yet he never faltered, never lost his spirit from first to last. It was brilliant in its unaffected simplicity, and it demonstrated once more that diction is the main pillar of the actor's art.

ANNIE RUSSELL.

July 10. 1898.

In placing the name of the actress at the head of this article, I have no intention of ungraciousness towards the authors of "Sue" for I admire Bret Harte the novelist, and I think that he has not altogether made a mistake in accepting Mr. T. Edgar Pemberton as his theatrical collaborator; but in this case the actress is the thing, and the play owes it vitality to her. There are moments in the simple little story of Sue's awakening to love, when we are pitched and tossed from laughter to sobs, which are nothing short of exquisite. Still, although I have not read "The Judgment of Bolinas Plain," I can easily imagine that the book is far better and far more convincing than the play, for in the former the novelist has it all his own way, whereas in the latter he appears to be severely handicapped by the dramatic laws of brevity and conciseness, which can only be overcome by a very experienced hand. Neither Bret Harte nor Edgar Pemberton appear to be very familiar with the craftsmanship of the dramatic form; hence their play frequently betrays the method of the novelist, and necessarily, for want of room, many unexplained details are sprung upon us with surprising suddenness. The minor characters appear to have suffered least of all; but Sue herself, after her flight from Lone Farm with the Acrobat, becomes a somewhat enigmatic personality; and, although I feel inclined to believe what the authors tell us, the suspicion remains that the young woman, who was so easily bewitched by the tinsel of a mountebank's paraphernalia and fine talk, paid for her imprudence with her honour. However, we are assured that her purity escaped unhurt, and as Sue has entirely conquered us, thanks to Annie Russell, we readily sacrifice probabilities to possibilities, and rejoice that she will

henceforth not only honour and obey, but love her good-natured bore of a husband.

I am not prepared to go quite so far as my friend of the *Daily Mail*, who calls Annie Russell "the English Duse"—I should like to see her in greater parts before endorsing so extreme a statement—but I will say that the young actress almost reconciles me to the American invasion, which has so sorely tried us this season. Here at least is an artist—a woman who has not come to conquer by her beauty, her limbs, or her diamonds. Her personality is altogether unassuming, and so is her manner. She preferred to greet the applause at the end of the act with averted features rather than destroy the picture on which the curtain fell. She plays carelessly, unconsciously, as it were; she has no voice for the gallery and no eyes for the stalls; she lives altogether in her part, and what she does and what she says are as natural as if in all her life she had done nothing else but live far away from the crowd on the lonely plains, with the one man and her cattle and her hens. The charm is unspeakable—it is indescribable; but it grips firmly from the moment that Annie Russell is on the stage to the moment when she slips, without flourish or obvious excitement, behind the scenes. And behind the charm there lurks force—no fireworks, no ebullition, no fortissimo theatricality, but the convincing power which is the legitimate child of sincerity alone. What this remarkable woman may yet be able to achieve, I dare not conjecture; but, as I sat and admired, I pictured her in "Little Eyolf," in "The Master-BUILDER," in the entire Ibsen repertoire, of which Miss Robins has so far been the undisputed and also the unemulated exponent; and I beheld a Hilda, an Asta, a Mrs. Linden, as we have never seen them before. Whether the Frohmann management will ever afford Miss Russell the opportunities which would allow her to exhibit the fulness of her gifts, is a question into which I dare not enter; but this, I submit, is incontestable: since Ada Rehan's appearance in London, America has never sent us a more competent representative of her dramatic art than Annie Russell.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC.

July 10. 1898.

Edmond Rostand is a man of many gifts, but the greatest of them all is his good fortune. He had come long before "Cyrano"; he was barely in the twenties when the Français produced his "Romanesques," and the Press—Sarcey in front—hailed him as a new poet. Later Sarah Bernhardt took him up, and for her he wrote "La Samaritaine" and "La Princesse Lointaine," works of merit, which however did not much enhance his reputation. But with "Cyrano" he reached with a bound the pinnacle of fame, and—an unheard of thing, even in France—on the very evening of its production the Government promised him the Cross of Honour.

Since that memorable evening of December 27, 1897, Rostand has cast all other French poets into the shade, and in that hyperbolic enthusiasm so dear to Parisians, he has been placed on the same pedestal with Victor Hugo. Nor has the sweet cup of universal praise been spoilt by many bitter drops of depreciation. The *Mercure de France* alone, the organ of the writers of the Latin quarter, ventured to join issue with the hallelujahs, and published a criticism which sounded uncommonly like "Consuez Cyrano!"

But Rostand, with his exquisite lyre, with a "panache" even more his own than Cyrano's, has come at the right time to restore to the French public—sick unto death, from overfeeding, of neurotic problem plays and indecent comedies—some of that love of gaiety, of that admiration for romantic heroism, which is, after all, innate in every human being, whether French or otherwise.

That in a country where dramatic poesy is by no means extinct, the halo of the masterpiece should have been conferred upon "Cyrano" is by no means astonishing; nor must we find it strange that Rostand achieved the incredible distinction of being coupled with the immortal Hugo. Both manifestations are very easily explained. The play of *Cyrano* unites more of the elements of romantic drama than any other dramatic poem of the last decades—more than any of the works of Coppée, of Bornier, Parodi, or Deroulède. There is a mighty love interest; there is the incomparable bravery and audacity of *Cyrano*, his strength of character, his chivalrous self-denial, his reticence to proclaim his love for *Roxane*, until well-nigh in his last breath the truth bursts out in the magnificent line: "Non, non, mon cher amour, je ne vous aimais pas"; there is the note of gaiety in the delightful couple of the *Ragueneaus*, in the boisterous young cadets, in the jovial monk; there is patriotism, jubilant at first, then glorified in the death of *Christian*; there is a glimpse into the splendid era of *le roi Soleil*—in fine, everything to evoke smiles and palpitations and tears.

So far there is every reason to endorse the judgment of Paris; but when it comes to pairing Rostand with Hugo, a poet to whom no one dared to compare even the splendid *Theodore de Banville*, a little reflection will produce a demurrer. For if ever the language of the gods was uttered with the grandeur and the assurance of a god, Victor Hugo did it. His inspiration was as boundless as the flight of his imagination was sublime; and if both sometimes led him into regions where no ordinary mortals could venture to follow him—regions where the sublime is almost imperceptibly divided from the bombastic—yet he would never descend into the lower depths of the commonplace in expression or form. But Rostand, admirable as the major part of his work is—for there is richness of thought, felicity of wording, and almost unbroken melody of verse—sometimes forgets the milieu of his drama, and indulges in modern phrasing, which for a while destroys the harmony of his conception; he also treats his rhyme too often with levity, transgressing the laws of rhythm, which in French are, if not too strict, some-

what severe. Whether this be weakness remains to be seen, but to me it appears as if Rostand, who is undoubtedly a dramatist first, and in the second place a poet, would sacrifice everything at present in order to obtain a dramatic effect, and the result is not always happy. For all that—and the admission would seem surprising, since the mastery of Rostand as a dramatist has been so much belauded—I prefer to read the play than to see it, for as a drama it fails to satisfy me, while as a poem, divorced from the dramatic form and the countless interpolations which serve but as foils to the central character, its lyricism is so fascinating that one would fain possess the power to set it to music.

The representation of Coquelin and his henchmen has no doubt something to do with the lesser pleasure enjoyed in the playhouse, but I maintain that the drama with its now familiar story is to a certain extent uninteresting. The first act, the performance at the Hotel de Bourgogne, is not only a somewhat cumbersome, though highly picturesque, introduction, but, curiously enough, it does not prepossess us in favour of the hero, who is uncouth, tantalising and quarrelsome. The second act, at Ragueneau's patisserie, again does not attack the drama with full force, until Cyrano meets Christian, and much of the comic relief is but unimportant padding; but as soon as the true note of pathos is sounded the poet speeds onward with increasing power; the third act is wholly admirable, the balcony scene—I say it with bated breath—worthy of Shakespeare; the fourth act is full of life and bustle, and as it proceeds it thrills us with that emotion impressionable people experience when our soldiers embark for foreign service and leave their girls behind them. In the concluding act methinks we drop into an anti-climax. I am not conventional enough to clamour for a happy ending, although in this case, since once Rostand has made free with history all along, I should have enjoyed to see so brave a fellow as Cyrano rewarded with Roxane's hand, which was no more than his reward for fourteen years of self-sacrifice and unselfishness unequalled in history since the days of the Biblical Jacob.

And frankly, this interminable death-scene of the bludgeoned and bandaged hero is not to my taste, all the less because it is not natural, and only serves to expand the act to normal length. I read the beautiful words with unmixed pleasure, my heart beat louder, as at length in the throes of death the brave struggler made a supreme effort not to succumb, and then breathed his last with the proud possession of his "panache." But the agony on the stage shocked me, the unreality of the thing provoked my protest, and the drastic performance of Coquelin, instead of bringing tears to my eyes, harrowed me to almost physical discomfort. Coquelin—and this refers to his entire impersonation—is no great commander of pathos. His voice does not lend itself to it, and, conscious as he seems of this defect, he is inclined to "force the note," as the French put it. Humour and valour he knows how to express with almost unrivalled intensity; he can make us laugh and smile, and when he raises his voice to extol manliness and bravery he strikes home, although his bearing is less that of the cavalier than of the "grands valets," of whom he is the inimitable creator. But as soon as it comes to the expression of pathos, he is unconvincing, and thus the third act, most intelligently played as it was, did not convey those emotions which in so fine a love scene should vibrate in every spectator. It may be that Coquelin restrained his feeling and essayed to give less a Cyrano of the book than the roughly moulded man as he appeared in life; but, to my mind, this conception is antagonistic to the characterisation of the poet, and if I were to be quite frank, I would say that Coquelin was only partly qualified to undertake this impersonation. That his acting did not mar the play is natural enough, when we remembered how high Coquelin stands in the favour of his country, and moreover that a man of his great talent could not possibly wholly fail in a character which episodically is so well suited to him.

But the real Cyrano is yet to come.



THE VICAR'S DILEMMA.

A Masterpiece!.....???

July 17. 1898.

Veder' Napoli e poi morir' !

I have seen my Naples, and now, with a soul full of glorious joy, I am ready to leave this vale of tears, this terrible earth full of wicked people and wicked plays. For at last the nineteenth century has done its duty towards the English stage, has rewarded it for countless years of unceasing struggle, has vouchsafed to it the one desire of its heart (if our stage have a heart), *'A Masterpiece.*

Yes, a masterpiece, write it large, Mr. Compositor, a *master-piece* is "The Vicar's Dilemma," a gem so precious and so brilliant that even I, none of the easiest to please, can find no fault, but bow my head and bend my knees in prostration.

Oh, the unforgettable moment when the author at length appeared before the receding curtain. They had called him vociferously from the first; but the response was slow, for he, the darling of the Muses, knew that first-night victories are easy now-a-days, and that the crucial test of enthusiasm is its power of endurance. And thus the walls trembled like those of ancient Jericho, throats grew hoarse, women became frantic, and even the critics unbent and joined in the chorus of "Author! Author!!" When he came he was superb—a giant—not mightier than we expected, but a splendid pendant to so gigantic a mind; his dark and fiery eyes were lit up with flames of pride and joy, and in the thicket of his moustache there played a smile so serene, so condescending, and so full of indulgence for our lesser intellectuality, that the thrill of enthusiasm shot through our veins as if an immense Leyden jar had touched the whole audience. Such cheering has rarely been

heard within the walls of a theatre. But it was deserved. Yes, three times it was deserved; for not only is "The Vicar's Dilemma" as witty a play as has been fathered by a modern English pen, but the originality of the author is no less astounding than the boundless fertility of his humour. He—let me record his name—Mr. A. Vicarson (Vicar's Dilemma—Vicarson, excellent) has in fact created a new genre of play; he has added to the thousand and one denominations which overcrowd our playbills "the original character comedy." What it means I do not know, nor do I care; when great minds tell me that they have made a new discovery, I never doubt—I believe; and, judging by Mr. Vicarson's play, I believe that a character comedy is a conception in which the conflict between character and comedy is so tremendous that both amalgamate into one great harmonious chaos.

In a drama of so subtle a texture it is well-nigh impossible to discover the thread of the action—nothing is definite, nothing is prepared in the artificial manner of the common play—everything floats in an ocean of mirth, as Maeterlinck's characters float in haze. But there is no lack of robust psychology, no want of depth. In fact, the author is so anxious that we should grasp the thoroughness of his familiarity with human nature that he almost smothers his vicar with scientific explanations. The vicar, it must be known, is a man doting on marriage and on phrenology; he is in a constant dilemma about both; he is untiring in his search of "bumps" and therefore treats everybody's head around him as a happy hunting-ground, accompanying his investigations with an apologetic "Excuse me, sir, may I feel your bumps?" or "Excuse me, madam, may I feel your bumps?" Whereupon the people in the house roar with laughter or gape with amazement at so original a mania. The vicar is equally enterprising in his endeavour to secure a better half. He has even used the medium of the *Matrimonial Post*, and thus he is led to offer his hand and heart in return for the ample purse and the ample charms of a somewhat over-ripe maiden. When he is accepted, the dilemma almost threatens to rend him in twain; for there is a

young and pretty niece on the premises of his matrimonial expedition, and, of course, since our vicar is no longer a chicken, he falls an easy prey to the spring-like temperament and the fascinating beauty of the younger lady. It is a very difficult position for a clergyman to be in, and if this were an ordinary play I would say that it is not very dignified either. However, all's well that ends well, and when there is every reason to fear a terrible catastrophe, the old spinster meets with a former sweetheart, who is only too willing to redeem his pledge for the sake of her banking account.

Throughout, the complications of the plot are handled with the utmost dexterity, and the dialogue abounds in humour. The characterisation is masterly, and the touches of human nature are so striking that they are graven indelibly upon one's memory. What could be more pathetic than this explanation of the tie of affection between two lovers: "When they were children they used to have one brandy-ball between them, and they handed it to each other in turns." Is it not a life-story written in one simple sentence! And what could be more eloquent of the vicar's terrible dilemma than his panic-stricken explanation: "I have not hād a shirt-button nor a cup of tea!" or how could his character be more concisely described than in these few words: "I am afraid my love-making will never get me my living." And these are but small samples of the copious fruit that loads the tree; every line is pregnant with meaning, and in the end the effect of so much cleverness and originality is so overwhelming and bewildering that, like the man in Gus Elen's classic, "We dunno where we are."

But in our encomiums of the author we must not forget to hold the scales in just equality; certainly his is the lion's share of the triumph, but the leading actor, too, deserves our thanks and our congratulations. Thomas Thorne has returned to us covered with provincial laurels, and it is a delight to find that he has lost none of his former attractions. Still his tongue pushes the words against the teeth of his upper jaw, and produces a soft sound of amorous lisp; still he faces his audience with rolling eyes and half-uplifted arms; still, in moments of pas-

sion, his voice is broken like the panting of a steam-engine : Ffutt-ee! ffuttee! It goes like the piston furiously driven by the heated air. And when fluency masters his emotion, the words fall from his lips slowly, distinctly, detachedly, like pebbles thrown into calm waters. It is a wonderful art, this elocution of Thomas Thorne's. His sister, Miss Emily Thorne, round whose rotundity the author has written some love-scenes of exquisite delicacy, is an actress of merit, but whether she felt happy in dealing with a part which contained solely humours of personality is questionable. Nor was Mr. Righton quite himself—or, rather, he was so entirely himself that he joked on his own account, and left his author in the lurch. The energies of Mr. Gillmore and the superhuman efforts of Mr. John Beauchamp seemed wasted upon a play which was entirely focussed on the main character ; and of all the other members in the cast only a very pretty and very inexperienced young lady, Miss Lucie Milner, had some chance to hold her own in face of Mr. Thorne's irrepressible power of concentration. When Miss Milner has learned to use her hands with freedom, and when somebody has taught her the secret of natural diction, she will probably be a most charming ingenue. At present she is at best a prepossessing novice.

However, the actors left no stone unturned to do justice to the author's work ; and they too were cheered to the echo by the grateful minority that, unlike those who came away overwhelmed before the end of the second act, had remained to drain the joyful cup till it was nail-proof.

And when, soon after eleven, the happy spectators crowded into the vestibule, there dwelt serenity upon every countenance, for had it not been a glorious evening for the British drama ?

T E R E S A

Sept. 11. 1898.

I am an ardent supporter of general Courts of Appeal and have been a Dreyfusard ever since the hideous farce of the degradation was enacted. But in some matters I am as rigid an upholder of the "*chose jugée*" as M. Godefroi Cavaignac; and when once, after the mature reflection I am wont to give to plays, I have had my say, I will not budge, albeit that fifty managers were to ask for revision by inviting me to revivals.

In the case of young Mr. G. P. Bancroft's play, "Teresa," I have held the scales as evenly as I could, when it was tried some months since at Camberwell, and what I said then I emphasise to-day. It is a complicated, immature, fairly uninteresting melodrama written under the spiritual influence of, and inspired by, Victorien Sardou; but the style is sometimes promising, and if people do not spoil young Mr. Bancroft—because he is his mother's son—he may in the dim and distant future (after much reading of Ibsen and the great Germans) turn out something respectable in dramatic literature. His present work contains, however, scarcely any indication that Mr. Bancroft is an original thinker; its form is far from flawless, and the little tinkering up to which it has been subjected since the trial at Camberwell amounts to next to no improvement.

Nor have the actors made much progress. In spite of "the great exaggerator's" panegyrics in the erstwhile "Largest Circulator," Miss Violet Vanbrugh is as far from Sarah Bernhardt as ever, and her long speeches are delivered with a monotony betraying want of training. Miss Vanbrugh is, however, an interesting personality, and if she would stick to higher comedy instead of prematurely rushing into the "grand jeu" she would soon conquer a deserved front place. Mr. Arthur Bouchier is

still stolid, and continues to make faces which express anything but emotion, and Mr. Laurence Irving has apparently seen no reason to remodel his conception of the extraordinary Italian Count. It therefore remains a caricature, which would be funny but for the actor's terrible earnestness. The other actors are much the same as before, some good and some indifferent. Miss Gigia Filippi alone shines out like a pearl among pebbles, and makes a great deal of a poor little part. If we only had much material like the Sisters Filippi, in whom acting is innate, we should soon sail clear of that mediocrity which becomes so painfully manifest whenever performances of work above the commonplace are given.

THE TERMAGANT.

(A letter.)

To the Editor of THE SUNDAY SPECIAL.

Sept. 11. 1898.

Sir,—May I be permitted to resume my activity with a parallel criticism of the most prominent play of last week, "The Termagant," which had interested my confrère so deeply that I longed to make its acquaintance, and to accentuate, if possible, his praise of its good qualities.

Alas, my dear confrère, for once I am entirely in disagreement with you, and as I am not wont to disguise my feelings when the sacred cause of our drama is concerned, I tell you plainly that never during the last ten years have I suffered so intensely the martyrdom of "ennui" as on that luckless evening when I endured "The Termagant." I will tell you also that for the first time in my career as a dramatic critic—a period of eighteen years—I left the theatre before the curtain rose upon the last act, because my brain was benumbed, and my eyelids were loaded with lead.

You cannot conceive what it costs me to admit this when so many interests are at stake, so many workers concerned, and particularly because it must cause pain to Miss Olga Nether-sole, in whose career I take a deep and sympathetic interest; but when I am called upon to criticise, I cannot indulge in palliation.

You wish to know the grounds on which I break the staff over the work of L. N. Parker and Murray Carson?

I could embody my condemnation of the play in one single sentence: "The Termagant" is full of emptiness. It is the impotent effort of overvaulting ambition. It is modern mediocrity

grafted upon Shakespearian methods. It is an immense compilation of words uncemented by thoughts, and but rarely adorned by grace of style. It is a play neither of action nor of character, nor yet of virtuosity; it is insincere, diffuse, disjointed, and in its atmosphere the breath of human nature is entirely wanting.

You will ask me whether I am blind to the pictorial qualities of "The Termagant" or deaf to its musical illustration, or callous to the fanciful charms of the Court of Love in the first act, and the weirdness of Roderigo's personality? And my answer will be: No; I am in full possession of all my senses, and if Messrs. Parker and Carson had wedded the words of their text to Mr. Corder's music in operatic form, I should have been less severe and less fatigued, for in opera a bad libretto may be easily redeemed by the fascination of music. But there is no question here of opera—and those who understand music, will tell you that Mr. Corder excels neither in originality nor in wealth of imagination. "The Termagant" is described as a play, and, as such, it is to be judged by the canons of the drama.

From first to last the authors have entirely failed to grasp their subject. They have strayed into the alluring fields of decorative art; they have set a grateful task to the painter, the costumier, and the wigmaker—for as a picture without definite subject "The Termagant" is divine; and for the rest they have relied upon their loquacity and told the thinnest story in a myriad of words, now in the form of prose, then in something which in print may resemble verse, but which in the mouth of the actors was neither the one nor the other.

It is a common thing to find so-called poetic plays defective in characterisation; but it is very rare indeed to find such waxen dolls of clockwork mechanism, created to represent *dramatis personæ*, as in "The Termagant." There is no atom of humanity in them; they leave our hearts cold. They do not even stir our minds, for they are neither of the flesh fleshly nor of imagination imaginative; they are built of phrases, soulless, profuse, bewildering phrases. Hence not one of the characters gains our sympathy, and if by force of will I were

to discover anything in the confusedly drawn personality of *Beatrix*, it would be a pathological case, which, this not being a medical journal, I cannot enlarge upon in these columns.

It may be urged against my severe condemnation of this play that I ought to have considered the good intentions of the authors, as works like "*The Termagant*" may at least aim at raising our drama from the slough of music-hall variety and inane farce; but in my estimation good intentions are no excuse for bad art, and when the craving for outward splendour, as in this case, is detrimental to all the essentials of the drama, I feel bound to express my opinion as forcibly as my pen will allow. For Messrs. Parker and Carson are no novices, no poor strugglers for a hearing, but experienced and prosperous craftsmen who can afford to do well and—ought to know better. It would scarcely be just to lay the entire burden of the failure on the authors; the actors, too, are responsible for it. Mr. Murray Carson, threatened with ruin by the fulsome eulogies of the "exaggerator," who is the worst enemy of Esmé Beringer, of Violet Vanbrugh, of Arthur Bouchier, and other promising young people, has made no progress since his victory in "*The Duchess of Malfi*." His mannerisms have become intensified, and while once he was in the way to become a tragedian, he displays now all the airs, graces, and poses of the operatic tenor, while his facial contortions are sometimes ludicrously painful; his diction, too, has suffered, and as one who wishes him heartily well, I warn him against mistaking self-consciousness for intensity. Miss Olga Nethersole will by this time have realised that her personality does not lend itself to the portrayal of commanding figures in plays of classical pretensions. She is one of the cleverest actresses we have—her "*Dame aux Camélias*" is fine, her "*Frou-Frou*" magnificent—but she is modern from top to toe, she is too "petite" to grace the rich and complex garb of stately mediæval dames, her voice is too sharp, her pronunciation oftentimes too mannered to befit the flowing language of metrical compositions. Interesting, intense, highly intelligent Miss Olga Nethersole always is, but her sphere lies in modern life—in the salon, not in the Châteaux

d'Espagne of bygone days.

I will not prolong this letter with detailed remarks upon the individual members of a long cast. Nobody in particular seemed to touch the period in which the action was laid, or to be able to establish any harmony of cadence in the sentences and the lines of the author. That higher stage management, which does not only apply to the lifeless furniture of the stage and the position of the actors, but to the meaning of the words, appeared entirely to be wanting; and when in this action, supposed to take place in Spain, Miss Esmé Beringer spoke of *Merchedes* (*Mercedes*), and somebody else of *Louis* (*Luis*), I read in these small shortcomings the revelation of our dramatic sufferings.

MACBETH.

Sept. 18. 1898.

Great achievements deserve grave consideration, and I, for one, shall be the last to pronounce a final opinion upon Mr. Forbes Robertson's characterisation of Macbeth at this late hour, while grinding presses near me groan for food.

But of the hero of the evening I wish to say at once and without reserve that the first impression created by this Macbeth was deep and likely to be lasting. Whether Mr. Forbes Robertson was by birthright as much the ideal Macbeth as he was the ideal Hamlet, is open to argument. In their mental affinity the two tragic figures are assuredly chips from the same block; both are idealists, men of great thoughts but weak in action; but Hamlet remains to the end a fantast, while Macbeth, spurred by his imagination, incited by witchcraft and superstition, dominated by the power of his wife, rushes into action and heaps slaughter upon slaughter in order to enjoy the outcome of his first crime, the murder of the king.

In Hamlet, Forbes Robertson succeeded entirely in realising the portrait drawn by the poet—he was fanciful without being an unconscious dreamer, he was eccentric without conveying madness. His Macbeth is perhaps not so complete a picture; he was grand in his ambition, grand in his struggles, grandest in his hopeless combat against his inexorable fate, but he was also august in the scenes with his wife. And upon this I join issue with his conception, although I know full well that the effect was not entirely due to Macbeth, but to the weakness of his wife. Here then lies the cause. Lady Macbeth (Mrs. Patrick Campbell) was weak where she ought to have been of towering strength, a Juno, a Diana, a Delilah, all harmonised in

one woman of overwhelming fascination. Macbeth, on the contrary, remained what he appeared to be from the first, a strong man, in whose vigorous body may or may not live a forcible, if impressionable, mind. If Lady Macbeth is really the woman her actions would tend to show, she must entirely rule this man, and prove conclusively that she is the stronger of the two. And this was never made evident. Mr. Robertson's Macbeth ever overshadowed his wife, in voice, in gesture, in every detail except dress, and thus he gave the character a new reading, which I cannot but consider psychologically unwarranted. However, this is the only discordant note which I would introduce in the hymn of praise I can honestly dedicate to Mr. Forbes Robertson. He is, with Henry Irving, the prince of our drama; as a tragedian he is a credit to our art, and wherever he has gone, to intellectual Berlin or to artistic Amsterdam, he has raised the reputation of our country. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, too, has gone to Holland and to Germany, and there, where not a single play, but a career, makes a reputation, she has been told that she is not a great actress, although an actress of merit. I am in entire accord with this opinion, and I felt once more how true it was when I saw her as Lady Macbeth. The cardinal fault I have already pointed out, but there must be added to this that neither her voice, nor, in my view, her personality, are apt to represent a real Lady Macbeth. In those days, I think, there were no neurotics; there were merely amazons and particularly *grandes amoureuses*. Lady Macbeth was a combination of the latter two; of the former she had nothing, for even somnambulism is no symptom of a disorganised nervous system. Now Mrs. Campbell was entirely neurotic as usual; a little Ibsen, a little Maeterlinck, a little "*précieuse*," I won't say a little "ridicule," but anyhow, in the sleep-walking scene, a little strange. She had otherwise good moments, and her delivery was fairly melodious; but we still wait for the real Lady Macbeth. Sarah failed, Ellen Terry partly failed, Mrs. Campbell, though nearer the mark, has achieved no complete success. Where is she to come from, and who is to take the place of the only Lady Macbeth of the modern period—Clara Ziegler?

I shall speak later of those who surrounded the hero, of Mr. Robert Taber, who was an impressive Macduff, of Mr. Ian Robertson, whose First Witch was intensely weird, of some others who rose above the common level. I shall then also speak of the stage-management, of the Banquo scene, and the battles. But these are minor details. For the present I wish to conclude with gratitude in my heart; for I feel that the production of this work was a distinct victory for our national drama.

THE GREAT RUBY.

Sept. 18. 1898.

M. Bourdin, when summing up the state of our drama in the Paris *Matin*, was not far wrong in declaring that our theatres were excellent, our scenic displays the finest in the world, our players of some account, and our plays puerile. But he might have put the last point with much greater finesse, and instead of dealing with playwright and play as a unity, he might have concluded that, if our plays are mostly below infantile intelligence, our writers are frequently men of brains, who could do excellent work but for mammon and manager. Look at Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton for instance, who are, with Arthur Collins, responsible for the latest Drury autumn fare; has ever so much ingenuity and cleverness been spent on any single play as on "The Great Ruby," which, in spite of all, is but a hat stand, whereon to hang garments and finery, or a bazaar for the exhibition of all sorts and conditions of things, dead and alive? The first act, in which the precious stone gets stolen by the cunning devices of a double brace of scoundrels modelled after the great Charing Cross gang, is not only a marvel of technical adroitness, but it is also a highly exciting chapter of a detective story, and, before all, a stage picture of unrivalled completeness and refined taste. I have but rarely seen a piece of decorative stage realism so fascinating as this silversmith's shop, with its wealth of treasures, its lifelike activity, and with a panorama of Bond-street that was as near akin to reality as can be attained with canvas and supers. It was therefore a matter for regret that from the second act the action began to drift into entangled by-ways, and therefore to flag. Perhaps the authors could not help themselves, and had to obey the manager, who has a certain programme of splendour which must be executed at all costs. And thus we had to follow the hunt

after the ruby with live horses and dead coaches, with ambulating furniture and omnipresent detectives, with balloons and boxes, with fitting scenery, now in Lord's Cricket Grounds, and even in mid-air twixt the regions above and the tear-stained valley below.

It was all very exciting, but oh! it was so monstrously long, and so knottily intricate that we were almost distracted between the struggle to take it all in and the amazement at the bewildering fertility of the author's invention. And thus it came to pass that, towards the middle, the play did not strike home with such vigour as the sledge-hammers of the late Druriolanus used to do. In fact, one of the big scenes of the play, a sleep-walking intermezzo à la Lady Macbeth, was only saved by the consummate assurance of Mrs. John Wood; and another, the cricket festival at Lord's, which was neither well planned nor well stage-managed, even fell lamentably flat, to judge by the meagre applause which greeted it. Under Augustus Harris such a scene — "Massenscenen," the Germans call them aptly — would have shaken the house to its foundations, for he was a grand master in that craft, and Arthur Collins, though perhaps a worthy successor, does not yet quite fill the dead man's shoes. In the third act there was a very exciting scene between the detective and four scoundrels, but on the whole the action halted, and it was not until well in the fourth that the story and the public showed signs of renewed interest. Indeed, the balloon scene, which was as creditable a piece of acrobatics as of stage-technique, shot a thrill through the audience, and since it was then about half-past eleven, the public would have been well satisfied to go home. But more was to come, more horses, more soldiers, more pageantry (not unconnected with danger, for the horses became restive), more talk, and it was quite on the verge of the morrow when the curtain fell upon the recovered ruby, rewarded virtue, united couples, and an ambulance holding the gory remains of misguided adolescence. It was too much of a good thing, even for old Drury's staunchest supporters, but the authors received a hearty call, and the tradition of the house was satisfied.

To act in such a piece is no small matter ; it requires physical strength, a powerful voice, and a thorough knowledge of the stage, all of which Mrs. John Wood possesses in the highest degree. She is truly a marvel ; her every word hits the target ; the feeblest joke glitters with wit upon her lips, and even her pathos, somewhat rugged as it may seem, touches the right chord. She is a pillar of the house. Mrs. Raleigh, too, is a talented actress ; her presence is magnificent, her carriage dignified and highly refined ; her limitations are merely vocal, and after a time her delivery fringes upon monotony. If I may offer a suggestion, I would beg Mrs. Raleigh to translate and to practise the curse in Mosenthal's "Deborah." I have it on the authority of great actresses that this terse and telling monologue is one of the finest modulators of the voice which can possibly be conceived. Among the other ladies, Miss Hoffmann distinguished herself by a very agreeable rendering of a thankless part, and Miss Bateman struggled hard with the character of a penniless society lady. Miss Menelly has improved since her undisciplined amateurishness in "Lord Tom Noddy" (or whatever the twaddle was called), and Miss Birdie Sutherland still tries to act. Among the men Mr. G. R. Foss deserves a compliment ; his detective was not of the stage stagey, but of Scotland Yard human, and that is a great achievement. Mr. Pateman, as the villain in chief, was sometimes intense, and often dull. I fear that he, as well as most of his colleagues, suffered from "fluffiness," an ancient ailment not unknown on first nights, when the parts have not penetrated into the skin, and the nerves are severely taxed. The General of Mr. Lowne was of the good old bluff pattern, and the Indian Prince of Mr. Robert Loraine was full of European culture and entirely devoid of Oriental fire.

As things stood on the first night, "The Great Ruby" wanted a great deal of cutting and polishing, and when that is done I fear that the connoisseurs will hardly pronounce it to be a genuine gem. But for the patrons of Drury Lane it will admirably serve its purpose, and for the manager it will probably be a treasure-trove, so much so that even I, who am as a rule ad-

verse to all speculation, have requested my stockbroker to buy me a little block of shares in Drury Lane, Limited, the profits of which I solemnly promise to devote to the production of a French chef d'œuvre, which has lingered in my desk, because (forsooth) it was too good for our stage.

And thus the miracle may come to pass that for the nonce the authors of the annual Drury Lane drama will have fathered, although indirectly, a real work of art. Oyez ! oyez!! oyez!!!

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

Sept. 18. 1898.

A friend of mine, a celebrated continental author, once won a singular wager. He contended that at the dessert of a wedding-dinner he would pronounce a successful toast, in which there should be not one coherent sentence, but merely grandiloquent words loosely strung together by mumbled syllables and letters, for such was his confidence in the paroxysmal enthusiasm of the wedding-party that he denied them all power of discrimination. And thus he spoke: "My dear friends—Happy day—Auspicious event—*abcdefghijklmnop*—Young couple—*hijklmnop*—Marital bliss—*qrstuvw*—Cloudless future—*xyzabcdefg*—Hearts beating in unison—*hijklmnop*"—and so on.

The toast was a great success, and after dinner the gay deceiver was the object of universal congratulation.

In Mr. Henry Hamilton this ingenious foreigner has found his rival and his peer, for in "The Three Musketeers," now on view at Camberwell, there is little coherence, much breezy language, colossal compilation of incidents, and an amount of clattering of swords and of frightfully thrilling music, which would under any circumstances suffice to lift our bourgeois to the fanciful regions of vanishing Asti Spumanti. Of Father Dumas, grandmaster still of the romantic school, there is very little left except the groundwork of the plot, yet even that has been successfully superstructed, and if our recollection of the novel had not lived dimly in our minds since our school-days, we should probably have accepted this version as an entire novelty.

Some will inquire why Mr. Hamilton took the trouble to re-write the play, which Dumas himself with sundry coadjutors has fairly well distilled from the novel, but that is entirely Mr.

Hamilton's business—the business of his conscience, I mean ; and the only explanation I can find is that the English adapter ever imagines that he can “improve” upon the foreigner by his second-hand lights. But let us leave Dumas entirely out of the question (since not even his spirit ruled at Camberwell), and deal with Mr. Hamilton's play as we find it. From a popular point of view it is a very great success, for it gives all that the public wants,—plot, passion and pyrotechnics : it gives also that little dash of naughty-naughtiness, represented by Miss Florence West (“Miladi”) in a night-gown, which gladdens the heart of our paterfamilias, provided the joke does not go too far. But it gives something more, and although I for one should have preferred to have found it in a more concise and clear canvas, I appreciate the breezy spirit and the tone of good old-fashioned chivalry which pervaded some of the scenes, particularly those in which d'Artagnan (Lewis Waller) and his Three Musketeers rattled their swords and showered upon us buckets full of brave words of little meaning but intense resonance.

Mr. Hamilton has been praised for his literary workmanship, his style and the choice of his language, but I perceived very little of it ; to me it all sounded like that famous toast with a difference, and at least one of the speeches, d'Artagnan's description of his famous ride, seemed painfully laboured. It should have been brief, bold, dashing, like the gallop of a steed, and it was as ponderous, as slow as a steam roller, although Lewis Waller's delightful impetuosity fired the audience to frantic applause. Towards the close of the play Mr. Hamilton obtained a better grip of his overwhelming subject, and the scene between the four friends and the treacherous courtesan, which deviated entirely from Dumas, contained something more than mere melodramatic vehemence. But the play, diffusely constructed and overcrowded with incidents as it was, bewildered and fatigued me, instead of rousing my enthusiasm and giving me pleasure. Fortunately the audience thought otherwise ; they were conquered from the first, and Lewis Waller's fine, manly presence, his glorious

voice, his unflagging energy, rendered them breathless. They also cheered Miss Kate Rorke, who seemed crushed by the weight of her verbose part of the Queen, and Miss Florence West, who was an interesting, although by no means an electrifying Miladi. The Three Musketeers, Messrs. Bassett Roe, Goodheart, and Gerald Gurney, were three lively and rough-and-ready swash-bucklers, but they would never have passed muster in France. Have these gentlemen ever read the novel? and do they remember the antecedents of the triumvirate? The King of Mr. Gayer Mackay was stagey, the Richelieu of Mr. Heslewood cockneyfied in language, and wanting all dignity. Mr. Alexander Calvert as Buckingham began very stiltedly, but improved as he went on. Last, not least, Miss Constance Walton (Gabrielle de Chalus) made a surprisingly happy debut. Her performance was singularly matured for so inexperienced an actress; her stage-presence is most agreeable and attractive; her voice has charm and an accent of pathos; in fine, this young lady is an acquisition to the younger ranks, and, next to Lewis Waller, she deserved the honours of the evening.

Mr. Charles Goodheart, working upon a very small stage with scanty material, displayed great promise as a stage-manager, but the "personal supervision" of the author proved of little account, since not even the names of the characters were correctly pronounced. Never since the Tower of Babel was there such a confusion of language—I counted five mispronunciations of d'Artagnan (Mr. Lewis Waller himself saying d'Ertegnen), I shuddered at Richeliou and Chaliou and Monsiou, and heaven knows what else. It is about time to pay attention to these trifles, which, in presence of a cultured audience, may court derision, and, therefore, danger. But at Camberwell all the geese were swans, and even the most inappropriate music inspired by the finale of "The Shop Girl," which constantly underlined the melodramatic passages, seemed to enrapture the public, bless them!

THE ELDER MISS BLOSSOM

Sept. 25. 1898.

The Kendals are back in the old home of their triumphs! I cannot write this without emotion, for as I welcome them to the St. James' Theatre, which has enjoyed glorious days under their rule, the question becomes irrepressible: why did they ever leave us, for the provinces, for the States, for a life of restlessness, when London could so ill spare them? Some will answer that Mrs. Kendal, by her unnecessary diatribes against the Press, by her somewhat irritating pose as the *Maman la vertu* of the British drama, has estranged many friends; and others—the majority—will contend that on their flitting visits to the metropolis the famous couple proved to have remained behind the times in the choice of their plays. For the days of Sardou and his scraps of paper are over, and the author of "The Shop Girl" (who also wrote "The Silver Shell") was but a poor defender of the old school, when Ibsen had severely damaged its rickety walls, and Pinero, with "Tanqueray," had planted his waving banner in the breach. Be this as it may; I have no desire to recriminate, and only wish to explain the strange and far too lengthy eclipse of two great favourites: I do not exaggerate in saying that every sincere playgoer must rejoice at the return of the Kendals, and hope to keep them in London for ever.

Thus the first night at the St. James' Theatre was a cheerful event, not only because we were eager to shake hands across the footlights with old friends, and to applaud them with all our might, but also on account of the fact that they brought us a play by two young men, upon whom henceforth we shall found hopes of noteworthy achievements.

"The Elder Miss Blossom," by Ernest Hendrie and Metcalfe

Wood, if it be not a work of great importance nor a play of spontaneous evolution (for its groundwork is wholly artificial), is in many respects a praiseworthy effort. The authors are, I understand, both actors, one of them, Mr. Hendrie, a player of much experience and some note. This accounts in some measure for all the faults of composition, for the cumbersome exposition, the complicated plot, the desperate attempts to drag in comic-relief, the paramount desire to adhere to the strict and mechanical rules of the well-made play. But these faults are counterbalanced, ay, but for one grave error I should have said outweighed, by sterling qualities, in particular, by originality. English plays frequently reveal their stories in their titles. And *prima facie*, when one reads "The Elder Miss Blossom", with Mr. and Mrs. Kendal on the programme, one would expect the old, old story of two sisters and one man beloved by both; but our authors are made of bolder stuff, and they have dared to run outside the well-worn railroad of the commonplace; they have blighted our expectations and defeated our premature imaginings by telling us a story which is entirely fresh and not a little pathetic.

There is bliss in credulity, and thus, if it be possible to accept the *donnée* that a man proposes in writing to a girl whom he has seen once, and whose Christian name he does not even know, and that by mere accident the letter reaches not the young girl for whom it is intended, but her aunt, who is well on the way to maturity, the play is thoroughly enjoyable. For, once the action is well in motion (after some scenes of needless talk) the conflict becomes deeply interesting, and at times engrossing. True, frequently the comedy element is a jarring chord in the symphony of pathos, which sounds many true notes of a woman's heart; but up to a certain point we follow the authors with growing sympathy, for they have understood how to draw at least the character of the older woman with such a firm hand, that she is more than a lay figure of merely stagey vitality. Where we join issue is with the psychology of the play, with the knowledge of the world of the authors, in the episode after the great scene in which the man

awkwardly confesses that he intended the younger, not the elder Miss Blossom to be his wife. This scene is of splendid invention, and it held us with a grip of iron, but the effect vanished when the man, instead of taking a discreet departure, kept "hanging on" to win the jilted woman, since the younger had (conveniently) given her heart to another. From a scenic point of view this, and the subsequent happy ending, may be defensible, but in life people don't do such things—and if they do them, well, then the name they deserve is not one of which a well-bred man would be proud. Nor will I admit the plea that the authors have done their best to render the position acceptable by adorning the elder Miss Blossom with a crown of womanly virtues. The fact is that the wooer was a middle-aged man, and (as played by Mr. Kendal) a man of scant emotions, and people of such build are, humanly speaking, not likely to transfer their affections from a rosebud to a fading autumn flower.

However, it is easy to carp or to propose what the authors would have done if the younger Miss Blossom had been free—a problem of gigantic dimensions whose solution would serve no purpose. We have to consider the play as it is, and as such, with all its faults, it is a firstling of so much promise that a word of warm congratulation and of encouragement should be offered to the two collaborators, who have begun their career with such an auspicious success.

The Kendals are excellent judges of acting, and it was therefore to be expected that the company would be adequate. But it even surpassed our expectations. Mr. Kendal himself was perhaps the weakest exponent of all; he is too rigid, too unemotional, there is too much in him of the government official to move or to rouse us. He is always correct, always word-perfect, well-bred, and well-mannered, but that is all. The spark divine is not in him. Mr. Charles Groves, ill-provided with a part of mere artificiality, made the best of it; Mr. Rudge Harding, as an amorous and golf-loving young parson, was just as pleasant and human as we expect such reverend gentlemen to be. Mr. Ames, as a stuttering valet, amused everybody by the na-

tural way in which he exhibited this infirmity. But the flaws of physical nature are scarcely a fitting object for ridicule. In Miss Nellie Campbell, who was the younger Miss Blossom, a very comely and clever actress has come to the fore. With a little protection on the part of the managers, she may conquer the place of Miss Maud Millett, and as she has far more intelligence than that erstwhile famous lady, and possesses no less attraction, Miss Campbell has every opportunity to improve upon the traditional tea-and-tennis-young-lady of modern English comedy.

And now I wish to speak of Mrs. Kendal, the one perfect actress of our stage. Can I say anything too extravagant in her praise? or speak too severely of our blindness in showering so much eulogy on other equally well-known but infinitely less-gifted women, because she, had drifted away, from our memory? Alas, how true Schiller was when he said that posterity twines no wreaths for the mummer. And to think that we could have forgotten Mrs. Kendal, with her serene smile, her graceful personality, her exquisite breeding, her wonderful vivacity, and best of all, her inimitable *savoir faire*. Mrs. Kendal is every inch an artist, every atom an actress; and if nature has not overwhelmed her with depth of feeling, with the tragic note that causes every heart to vibrate, it has lavished upon her above all and in rich profusion the power to express by her intelligence and by her features every nuance of the human emotions. To watch her is a delight; she is ever on the alert, ever a keen, living part of the action; unlike the wooden dolls who abound on our stage, she is as careful of trifling incidents as she is engrossed in great scenes. See the way she looks at the wedding presents in the first act, see how she reads a letter, see how she conducts a silent conversation with facial play and with active lips. All that is magnificent—it is art; it is the fruit of acute observation and ceaseless study. In the scenes where the sentiments deepen, she may not force tears from our eyes, for she cannot go beyond her limitations, but she is always vastly interesting, she is *tout ce qu'il y a de plus femme*, yet always restrained and distinguished to a fault.

A woman of such powers does not only stand in the very front rank of the English stage—for here she is *facile princeps*—but in her line she holds her own among the greatest actresses of the world. And it behoves every young actress in this country, such meteors as Mrs. Patrick Campbell not excluded, to sit at the feet of Mrs. Kendal as often as they can, and to learn the secrets of her art. For Mrs. Kendal is more than an actress; she is the personification of a perfect school of stage-craft.

MACBETH RE-VIEWED.

A Letter.

Oct. 9. 1898.

DEAR MR. FORBES ROBERTSON,—

I have a particular reason for choosing the somewhat familiar form of a letter while fulfilling my promise to revert to your performance and production of Shakespeare's great tragedy. For I want to speak about it in unfettered freedom and sincerity, yet in that tone of affectionate consideration which it is so much easier to introduce into this form, than into the cold, positive and severe language of the critical essay.

If you have read my first impressions, written after the première on the spur of the moment and under the spell of admiring enthusiasm for a noteworthy achievement, you will remember that I place your Macbeth very high, but prefer your Hamlet. In fact, yours is the Hamlet of our generation. And I gave sundry reasons why I believe that you have been nearer the poet in your creation of the Danish Prince than in that of the Scot. You were by no means a Macbeth of intense physical strength, nor yet one of great determination and iron will, for your talent is not chilly and firm, and massive like a rock, but it is clear and sparkling like the crystalline sources of great rivers that furrow the land and render it fertile. Still, by the side of your fair partner, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a picture of weakness in every sense, you were a tower of strength—of wicked strength—a wilful, lustful murderer, foolhardy yet cowardly, callous yet childish in his breakdown, impulsive, but rather inclined to be meditative. In fact, your Macbeth, modelled as he is on your Hamlet, is not an harmonious conception founded upon a fixed idea of characterisation, but rather a creation of

conflicting ingredients; a cross between heroic tragedy and modern philosophy. To men like Lombroso and Ferri, who devote their energies to the investigation of criminology and its origins, your Macbeth is a study of infinite interest, for it is an entirely new reading, and one that does your intelligence the highest credit. But is it defensible—is your conception true to Shakespeare? And to that I venture to reply in the negative.

You may feel inclined to deny the correctness of my judgment. You will say that you have treated your Hamlet and your Macbeth as if they were entities of radically different build. But I will meet such arguments by pointing to your slow and measured and deeply reflective delivery of the monologue—a delivery entirely foreign to the canny swordsman's nature Macbeth's was—to the scene with the murderers in which you were as slyly humorous and as unctuously courteous as Hamlet in his attitude towards Polonius—to your demureness (I know no better word) in the battle scene—to your outward appearance. I will add at once that as a rule I care but little for extraneous matters; but when a great artist is concerned, a man who thinks and studies profoundly, who leaves nothing to chance, I feel inclined to draw a conclusion from the means used to compose the picture. True, since the first performance you have shorn your beard, and have endeavoured to render your Macbeth martial by capillarian roughness; but the fact remains that at first you represented your hero in features which reminded everybody forcibly of Munkacsy's head of the Saviour. In this I feel convinced that you intended no blasphemy, any more than I do in citing the fact; but I cannot get away from the impression that, in portraying Macbeth as you did, you intended to bring home to us that he was something more than a mere warrior agitated by boundless ambition, that he was a philosopher, a leader of men, a creature of mystical powers.

I do not say all this to detract from the magnitude of your work, but in order to prove my contention that, in your Shakespearean gallery, your Macbeth, fine as it is, does not occupy the same exalted rank as your Hamlet. For if your Hamlet was a revelation—a thing never to be forgotten, ever to be enjoyed

—your Macbeth was but a confirmation of your untiring zeal, and an achievement which will consolidate your fame, if it will not enhance it.

Perhaps things would have been different if you had been better served by your Lady Macbeth, who should have been your mainstay, and was but a hampering element in your work. Mrs. Patrick Campbell was emphatically not the woman to undertake the part of Lady Macbeth. The art of Shakespeare is entirely foreign to her. She possesses none of the elements which constitute a tragic heroine. She belongs to the ethereal, sculful, yet soulless tribe of the Rossetti women; the warm, red, vigorous blood of Shakespeare's splendid creatures does not pulsate in her veins. The colossal speech, "I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me," a speech that would have stirred the soul of a man of sterner stuff than Macbeth, sounds a lie upon her lips. She has none of that animal power. Her guttural voice, her eye, her facial expression, her mouth built to pout, but not to kindle smouldering flames, are in direct antagonism to the words she utters. Mrs. Campbell was made to play Tanqueray, to play the woman in Paul Hervieu's "Tenailles," to play the whole modern *répertoire* in which the nerves, not the heart, are the mainspring of emotions.

But the woman of Shakespeare, whom she dresses as if Burne-Jones had drawn the design, whose language she speaks in modern accents of exquisite affectation (drawling sss-es and endless c-s) is beyond her reach; and unless she changes her method entirely, she may be detrimental to every Shakespeare play in which she appears. I have in my former criticism referred to other details of Mrs. Campbell's performance; I have also stated that she has had good moments, and I will add in justice to her that she has improved since then, that particularly the scene in which she receives the king was played with diplomatic shrewdness, and her demeanour in the latter part of the Banquo scene was full of restrained anguish. Such sketches detached from a faulty picture prove, what I have never contested, that Mrs. Campbell is an actress

of more than ordinary gifts, which would perhaps produce splendid results if she were enfranchised from injudicious advisers and blind admiration.

I have given so much space to the main characters in your production that I cannot deal with other members of the cast as exhaustively as I should like. But I must pay my tribute to Mr. Robert Taber, whose Macduff was as fine a piece of tragic acting as we have seen for a long time; it was truly heartrending to see the grief of this stalwart warrior when he heard that his all was slain by the murderer's hand. And although it may be true that the part plays itself, did not Mr. George Alexander earn the reputation of a tragedian by it? It requires an actor of great power to rouse an audience night after night as Mr. Taber does. I would also say a good word for the two murderers, Messrs. Herne Avery and Marcus St. John, who were as picturesque as they were pitiful; and, in conclusion, I must say to you, Mr. Forbes Robertson, how highly I enjoyed the beautiful, yet discreet scenery, in which you framed the play. In this, too, you proved how sincere an artist you are, for you almost made me forget the anti-climax of the constant scenic changes. Yet how much would I not have given to see you play on a bare stage, simply draped with curtains, where no scenery, no pageantry, no clanking arms would have deafened the grandeur of Shakespeare's words, the music of your beautiful voice.

THE ADVENTURE OF LADY URSULA.

Oct. 16, 1898.

"You have a pretty leg"—thus spoke Mr. Herbert Waring to Miss Evelyn Millard, and thereby hangs the play.

Leaving the merit of the adjective out of the question, for anatomy is no business of the dramatic critic, it cannot be denied that the legs—I beg pardon, limbs, for we are not in 1760 now—of Miss Evelyn Millard, or rather of Lady Ursula, are the mainstays of this first theatrical indiscretion of Mr. Anthony Hope.

Unfortunately, these limbs (I mean the limbs of the play) are not original but borrowed. Has not, in days gone by, one William Shakespeare written a delightful comedy called "As You Like It," and has he not stolen a march on Mr. Anthony Hope, who, as luck will have it, retold the same story in a somewhat modernised form some centuries later? And if the plain truth must be told, the bravos, thrice echoed by Mr. Clement Scott, are rather Shakespeare's due than Hope's, for Lady Ursula is none other than fair Rosalind transplanted to the cultured days of our wigged and courtly forefathers. In itself a process of this kind may not be considered reprehensible, for the playwrights who have feasted upon the glories of Shakespeare are countless; but, to pass muster, it must be successful, it must be interesting, and, uninfluenced as I was by the name of the author or by the sympathetic fluid of first night magnetism, I could not honestly say that it was either. No doubt the fault is mine, and in palliation I declare at once that the humour of Mr. Hope's books has as yet failed to penetrate the dimness of my skull, and that, having read Wilhelm Hauff's great novel "Lichtenstein," I have not been able fully to appreciate its pendant, "The Prisoner of Zenda."

But, admitting my shortcomings, I venture to submit that "The Adventure of Lady Ursula" is not a good play, even for a firstling, because it is unnatural from first to last—because it is, as the French put it so tersely, wholly *factice*. The rejoinder will doubtless be that, the comedies of the elder Dumas, for instance, such as "A Marriage of Convenience" and "Mdlle de Belle-Isle," were equally unreal and manufactured. And so they undoubtedly were. But Dumas was a grand master of his craft, a magician without equal, and—most forcible argument of all—since his days the stage has made great progress towards realism. So much so that if we can enjoy Dumas for his merits, with our eyes turned towards yesterday, we cannot applaud his imitators in the same spirit, because they are not only his imitators, but his inferiors.

If "The Adventure of Lady Ursula" were a play conceived and played in the true style of the last century—a style which was undoubtedly artificial—the improbabilities of the story might have been overlooked. We might have believed that a fair and frail damsel tried to masquerade in man's attire with the double intention of preventing a duel and converting a misogynist. But Mr. Hope never once succeeds in deceiving us as we desire. The atmosphere is modern; the dialogue is modern in mould and wording; the actors are modern in delivery and manner, with the exception of Mr. Charles Fulton, who alone seemed to reproduce the grace and courtesy of early Georgian grandeur.

The result is that we have a series of scenes, all pretty, proper, and neatly phrased, but never very exhilarating or pathetic, and ever reminiscent of the careful labour of the author, and his dexterous, but essentially unreal, Dolly dialogues. In fact all his personages are dolls with no characters of their own, with no vitality, no human composition—kinetoscopic subjects they are, which a clever man has endeavoured to vivify by accompanying their gestures by phonographic efforts of his own voice.

In the whole play there was but one episode which went somewhat below the surface of agreeable verbiage. That

was when the Lady Ursula pluckily tried to do justice to her male attire by accepting the duel with the man whom she loved. It was a grand opportunity sadly wasted. For the Lady, at the end of her tether, face to face with her friendly adversary, who had long discovered her sex, gasped: "What have you to say to me?" he did not reply: "I love you, Ursula," which would have lowered the curtain on a touching situation and a true touch of nature, but went on arguing with her for no other purpose than the (needless) preparation for the last act.

Where such immaturity is manifest, and I cite but one instance among many, it is needless to proceed with destructive criticism, or to ask how it is defensible that all the main characters are gathered in the last act under compromising circumstances, and indulge in well-worn devices of hide-and-seek behind curtains, and other unnatural tricks. Mr. Anthony Hope is evidently still unfamiliar with the stage, wherefore his dialogue is mostly duologue, and however much the bells of joy may ring in other papers for his first effort, he may believe me that it possesses but few of the qualities which would promise him as prosperous a career in the theatre as in the world of print. This opinion may seem harsh, but it is straightforward, and when "Lady Ursula" has lived its ephemeral life, Mr. Anthony Hope will probably acknowledge that, instead of belittling his undoubted gifts, I have served him well by tracing the cardinal shortcomings of his early attempts at playwriting. His influence is such that the truth cannot blight his prospects.

I elect to be brief on the exponents of "The Adventure of Lady Ursula," lest I should have to say to the actors jointly and severally (except Mr. Fulton) that the ways of the eighteenth century would appear to be a myth to them as well as to the stage-manager. The part allotted to Miss Millard was worthy of a great actress. And a great actress would have lifted the play. But Miss Millard played nicely, sweetly, coyly, like a London bourgeoisie of the outer circle, who delights in male fancy dress with due deference to Mrs. Grundy. It was an agreeable performance in a minor key. Mr. Herbert Waring, who can

be intense, as he has shown in "The Master Builder," has been mistaken for a comedian, whereas he is rather heavy and—it is meant without malice—somewhat pedantic. Miss Agnes Miller, a really excellent comedienne, belongs emphatically to our time, and neither her gowns nor the period harmonise well with her delightful fin-de-siècle vivacity.

The audience of the fourth performance, which I witnessed, applauded everybody and everthing, and as I heard the salvos thundering in my ear, I realised in amused mortification that the good British public cheered Shakespeare's Rosalind in the Lady Ursula of Anthony Hope. *Sic transit gloria!*

BROTHER OFFICERS.

Oct. 23. 1898.

First of all a word of encouragement to Mr. Leo Trevor. It would be rash to predict, for strange things may develop in the womb of the future, but I believe that he will improve as he goes along, since he possesses the one gift without which it is useless to court the stage—dramatic instinct. What Mr. Trevor lacks above all at present is—experience, as a matter of course, and freedom. He is daring to a certain extent. Witness the excellent scene at the end of the first act, where the Colonel slights the officer who has risen from the ranks, and the Baroness Roydon vindicates his honour and his position by toasting him in sparkling wine. But almost in the midst of the climax, when the summit is within reach, courage begins to desert our author, and, instead of looking ahead, he looks below, borrows from Moser, who in "The Private Secretary" had a tailor of plutocratic ambitions, borrows from Haddon Chambers, whose bushranger, Captain Swift, rose and courted Society (and danger), and gets into a melodramatic tangle between the two of them. It is a great pity, for without these foreign, yet essentially national, influences "Brother Officers" might have been a play of extraordinary merits.

As it is, meritorious in its exposition, faulty in its evolution, it serves a useful purpose. It teaches in broad lines the difference between the old school and the new, between the method of English writers, and of the French and German. The English writer tells us of the heroic deed of Sergeant John Hinds, V.C., who has saved the life of his superior officer, and thereby risen to the rank of lieutenant. He also shows us, in the first act, how ill at ease the erstwhile non-commissioned officer feels in the higher walks of the regiment and society. So far the psy-

chology of the play is pretty correct, albeit John Hinds is a trifle too clumsy in his manner to represent a fair specimen of our non-coms, many of whom would feel perfectly at home in the most refined drawing-rooms. However, let that pass, and imagine that Mr. Arthur Bouchier, the actor, in excess of zeal to illustrate the transition, overcolours his part. But in the next act (and here it is that our dramatic mountaineer loses heart) all psychological evolution is thrown to the winds, John Hinds has, hey presto! become a well-bred gentleman, and, in order to keep the play going, the author invents a story much akin to "Captain Swift," very poignant in one scene, where the newly-made millionaire is unmasked as a vulgar bandit, but altogether too artificial to be acceptable. Consequently the second act, in which we do not forge much ahead, fails, and the third is only saved by the aforesaid scene, which proves, if anything, that Mr. Leo Trevor is a very clever hand at melodrama.

Now a modern dramatist, particularly one from across the waters, would have scorned these hard-and-fast "Faits accomplis" of rapid metamorphosis, or these cunning devices which would gladden the heart of Dennery's disciples. Nor would he, if he had been ensnared by melodrama, have allowed such an unsatisfactory ending as the one chosen by Mr. Trevor. For really, if anyone had deserved the hand of the fair Lady Roydon it was Hinds, and not that silly young nincompoop of a Lieutenant Pleydell, whom not even clever young Aynsworth, a serious *jeune premier* for the nonce, could lift above the level of asininity. But the French and German dramatist, regardless of the ultimate issue, would have paid attention in the main to the evolution of the central character, instead of working up plot and melodramatic passion. He would have initiated us into the process of unbolstering, which a common man like Hinds must necessarily undergo, and then, gradually, he would have led up to a termination which would have probably (and humanly) coincided with the happy ending of Feuillet's romance of a poor gentleman; or, had he wanted to be cruel, he would have found valid reasons for casting the vali-

ant Hinds adrift, while his brother officer Pleydell conquered the fair lady beloved by both.

Mr. Trevor has been at a loss to discover these valid reasons; governed as he still appears to be by Dame Convention and that terrible virago Mrs. Grundy, he has bowed to the former, and allied the lady to the gentleman, and sent the soldier of fortune to distant service, where the heart may grow fonder, but absence will ultimately effect a radical cure. I must say that this conclusion, a flagrant specimen of British bourgeois sentiment, seemed to me the very weakest part of a play, which has otherwise some very good qualities, and contains many clever little touches of military life.

I have already mentioned Mr. Arthur Bouchier, and incidentally referred to his over-emphasis of Hind's uncultivated manners. But on the whole this actor has done nothing better since he began his career. He must know our soldiers intimately to portray the man from the ranks with so much veracity and force. It was a fine piece of acting, unmarred by Mr. Bouchier's usual facial contortions; it was manly, forcible and interesting; in fine, a thorough characterisation, which did the artist credit. Miss Violet Vanbrugh, in a part of somewhat vacillating outline, did not create the same favourable impression. Laying some of her shortcomings at the door of the dramatist, I must say that she was mostly monotonous, not to say funereal, in her delivery. Of course, I am ready to admit this is not entirely her fault, but due to the continuous fulsome flattery of the Great Exaggerator. There is no woman in the world who, in the long run, would be able to withstand comparisons with the incomparable Sarah. And the result is fatal. What is delightful and fascinating in a Bernhardt becomes fatiguing in her understudies. "Be yourself" is the advice every well-meaning critic should give to Miss Vanbrugh—for she has powers, she has a voice, she can express emotions—provided she uses them as Nature has given them to her, and not under the hot-house influence of fatal adulation.

Miss Dora Barton—the little Dora of yesterday who drew tears in Todhunter's admirable "Black Cat," has blossomed

into a clever little ingenue. Her assurance has increased, but her voice has lost much of its charm. She reminded me of the kittenish American soubrettes who have now and again visited us with companies from the States. A portion of the audience no doubt delight in this pert and saucy kind of elocution, but in the long run it is not sympathetic, and unless Miss Barton wishes to make a speciality of agreeable vixens and fascinating hussies, she will be well advised to cultivate a more sincere and less snappish style of conversation. Mr. J. D. Beveridge, an Adelphi recruit, played the unpleasant and difficult part of the Captain Swift-like adventurer. I have not left him to the last in order to bestow the least of my praise upon him. He has, after years of toil, come to the fore and proved that he is an actor of more than ordinary merit. For he played a melodramatic character with all the restraint required by the realistic drama. He reminded me at times of Teissier in Becque's famous "Ravens," and of Mr. Isaac Gordon as I witnessed him in the box at the Usury Commission. I cannot pay him a better compliment, for it implies that he was human to a fault, saying which it is only fair to conclude by dividing the honours of the evening between Mr. Beveridge, Mr. Bouchier, and the promising young author.

THE DRAMA OF "REMBRANDT."

Oct. 30. 1898.

"The authors wish to state that this drama, completed in February, 1896, was expressly written and composed with a view to theatrical representation. Although not especially intended for either the Comedie Française or the Porte St. Martin Theatre, it has been read by the two great artists who alone, in the authors' opinion, are capable of creating the complex character of Rembrandt."

Thus ran the preface of Messrs. Virgile Jozs and Louis Durrmur when in 1896 they issued their drama "Rembrandt" in book form, because the two greatest artists in France, Mounet Sully and Coquelin had not "seen themselves" in the part of Rembrandt.

It seemed almost as if there was no hope that the play would ever live its real life on the stage, for in France, as in England, the managers are few who would venture upon a production so costly, and, on account of its artistic value commercially, so unpromising. But the book was much and favourably discussed, and when Mr. Paul Franck, a young enthusiast, launched into theatrical management with the motto, "Art for art's sake," writ large on his banner, his first choice fell upon "Rembrandt."

The deed was bold, for the stakes were large. If it was to be done, it had to be done well; and to fill the frame of the scenes with the canvas of picturesque Holland in its golden age, was a task which would strain the purse and the intelligence of the manager in the highest degree.

Moreover there was the difficulty of competition; Paris is somewhat weary of its countless "theatres à côté," and the only available house, the "Nouveau Theatre," next door to the

Casino, has the reputation of many ventures and few successes.

The enthusiasm of Mr. Franck surmounted all these obstacles; he lavished beauty and talent on his production, while lowering the prices to a figure unknown in London, except in its meanest suburbs; and, for the rest, he was armed with sufficient patience and precious metal to await the moment when the fair fame of the spectacle should filter through to the masses and draw them to his playhouse.

His hopes have not been blighted. To-day not in Paris alone, in every centre of Europe, the play of "Rembrandt" has been talked about; Germany has taken it up, so has Belgium; a tour in Holland is in preparation, and hoping that England may one day be able to enjoy it unviolated by the practices of the adaptor, we, my friend M. L. Churchill and myself, have ventured to translate it into English, with all the deference and homage due to the two poets who are its authors.

* * * *

In the last sentence I have struck the key-note of the play, which also is the key-note of my admiration.

It is the work of poets, albeit that the language is independent of metre. It is also the work of painters, for in every scene, in every character, in the very stage-indications of the authors, we observe the pallet and the brush; it is a reconstruction of the days when life in Holland was pictorial art itself.

To plays of an historical character must be accorded the license which we are wont to allow to poets. We must leave the school-book and the encyclopædia behind, and condone minor inaccuracies so long as there is no flagrant falsification. For the exigencies of the stage are naturally antagonistic to the stern tradition of history.

In "Rembrandt," full as it is of personages of world-wide reputation, the authors have been singularly felicitous in handling their ample material, without presenting a talking wax-work show à la Madame Tussaud. Some of the characters are drawn with a few strokes of the quill—but these strokes are often masterly,

for, if there is not much substance, the essence of the personality is there—and on the stage a clearly defined outline is often more telling than a volume of description.

Naturally Rembrandt towers above all, as he did above his fellow-citizens. His entire history is unfolded, from the days of his ambitious youth in the Old Mill at Leyden; the sunny gaiety in his studio, where he revealed to many disciples the secrets of his art; the wooing, winning, and wedding of his beloved Saskia, and the meeting with that tragic little wanderer Hendrikje, who was to play such a momentous part in his after-life.

Already there is sadness in the opening chapter, for there is a hard struggle in the Old Mill before the young painter may leave Leyden, the City of Learning, for Amsterdam, the City of Art. But in the end the aged father, foreseeing the future of his son, and the mother, the dear old dame with the white cap and cuffs whom his brush has immortalised, grant him his liberty; for, says Harmen, in conclusion of a brilliant page of discussion upon the question of what happiness really is: "Happiness is self-sacrifice." And then the youth goes.

Gaiety floods the scenes that follow, but it does not last. Rembrandt's glory is short-lived, and his work is ill-rewarded; the new home, too, is not happy; Saskia, after having given birth to a son, fades away, and, as she sinks, she perceives that Rembrandt's heart is divided between her and Hendrikje, whose ripening beauty is as splendid as her devotion is infinite. The parting is painful. Jealousy torments the dying woman, and she beseeches Rembrandt to swear that he will never marry again. Yet before breathing her last she relents, and commits the childlike artist to the tender cares of Hendrikje. This death scene, beautifully as it is conceived, is painful by its extreme length, the point of the play, where the authors have forgotten that, if expansion is the privilege of the novelist, concentration is the foremost rule of the drama.

Saskia's death is the forerunner of Rembrandt's doom. His lucky star is extinguished. His debtors worry him; his work does not pay; his enemies are working for his fall; those he

loved depart one after the other; his goods and chattels, the treasures of his genius, are sold by auction at prices which were a shame to his native land. At length his son is torn from him in early childhood, and even Hendrikje has succumbed in the ghastly struggle for life. A weary pilgrim, he leaves the town which is no longer to him the City of Light, but the Wilderness of Ingratitude, and on a winter's day, weak in body and tortured by home-sickness, he turns his steps towards Leyden.

I have detached this following scene from the book in order to show of what stuff the play is made, and how my collaborator and I will attempt to do justice to the language of the French authors.

ACT V.

Scene I.

A road near a canal in the country about Leyden. Against the horizon a line of polders broken by dykes and rows of willows. In the distance Leyden is seen outlined against a leaden sky at the close of day. The roofs, belfries, weather-cocks, gables, and wind-mills of the town are heavy with snow. Ruysdael, broken and suffering, enters painfully from the left. He pauses by a willow stump and seems lost in contemplation of the landscape. A barge, drawn by a horse on the tow-path, goes along the canal. An instant later Rembrandt enters from the right.

Rembrandt (wearily): The bargeman asked me why I stopped here instead of going to Leyden with the other passengers..... Why indeed? (He pauses, gazing at the country and the distant town.)

Ruysdael (perceiving him): Ah!..... You are looking..

Rembrandt: I am looking.

Ruysdael: The country about here is beautiful, but there's fever in it.

Rembrandt: Yes, it is full of fever..... But the life is worse.

Ruysdael: Ay, the chills and fever soon break a man down.

Rembrandt (looking at him): Yes.

Ruysdael: Are you going to Leyden?

Rembrandt: Yes..... no..... I wanted to go, but I haven't the courage..... why should I go?

Ruysdael: It is always worth while if you have friends or kindred there.

Rembrandt: They are all asleep in the churchyard..... the father and mother, Adriaen, Gerrit, Machteft, Cornelius, William, Lisbeth..... all of them!..... I am the last..... Why should I go to the town? No one is there..... And yet, out beyond, near the White Gate by the old Rhine, stands my father's mill. It's great black sails still slowly rise and fall, the stones still crush the grain, and have not wearied, tho' Adriaen's voice no longer rings above the whirring saws. Ay, there stands the mill, but for whom does it turn now? I do not know..... I know no one, and no one knows me. They are all dead..... Dead, too, are those who loved them and me..... Van Swanenburch, Egma—all dead!

Ruysdael: Don't despair. There is always the country and the sky.

Rembrandt: The country is sad, sad, sad. I wanted to see it again—I find it desolate. And the sky is grey, hardly less grey than the town out there.

Ruysdael: But look at the line of the sky against the sea, and the great plain with its shining stretches, and the water gleaming across it like a silver ribbon! Look at it!

Rembrandt: How lonely it all is!

Ruysdael: But see how limpid the air is and how it floods everthing. You cannot tell where the light comes from—it seems as if space itself were luminous.

Rembrandt: The light is wonderful... How it shifts!...

Ruysdael: Yet how it quivers with a hidden strength as if its splendour shone through a veil. See the roof of that cottage nestled in the trees.....

Rembrandt: Yes, yes!

Ruysdael: It seems bathed in light. One almost hears the murmur of a brook.

Rembrandt: And the way the shadow of the bridge beyond loses itself in the line of the dyke.

Ruysdael: Don't you think it makes almost too harsh a note in this scheme of half-tones?

Rembrandt: Yes, it does.

Ruysdael: I should suppress it.

Rembrandt: So should I.

Ruysdael: No, no! Look how the twilight creeps around it!..... Ah! now it is perfect.

Rembrandt: You speak like a painter.

Ruysdael: I am a painter. Are you?

Rembrandt: Yes.

Ruysdael: What is your name?

Rembrandt: Rembrandt.

Ruysdael: Rembrandt! You!

Rembrandt: And your name?

Ruysdael: Ruysdael.

Rembrandt: What! what! Ruysdael! This forlorn vagabond wandering the highways, Ruysdael?—Ruysdael, the greatest painter in Holland!

Ruysdael: I am on my way to Haarlem. I have been recommended to the governor of the almshouse there.

Rembrandt: Then you, too! And I did not know..... I did not know!

Ruysdael: The only thing that grieves me is that I cannot paint now. I am an invalid, and my hands are palsied. You might think me an old man, but I am hardly past forty. You see, I was always too fond of nature. Standing for hours by the fens was what did for me. Ah! this is a beautiful country, but there's fever in it.

Rembrandt: And misery helped nature!

Ruysdael: Well, there were some days when I had nothing to eat.

Rembrandt: Your pictures?

Ruysdael: I never sold a picture for more than two florins.

Rembrandt: Two florins!

Ruysdael: That's something. Two florins will buy bread for a week. Only, when one loves a bit of landscape, it takes time to put it on the canvas.

Rembrandt: How did you live then?

Ruysdael: I painted backgrounds for rich painters.

Rembrandt: And now?

Ruysdael: Now that I can no longer hold a brush I am going to the almshouse. I am not sorry to be ill..... If only they will let me out sometimes to go into the country!..... The Country! That has always been my passion! And you? Do you paint still?

Rembrandt: If I couldn't paint I should kill myself.

Ruysdael: What do you paint now?

Rembrandt: I work for bourgeois who carp and haggle. I have just finished the Wardens of the Drapers' Guild. It is one of my best things. But no one cares for good painting.

Ruysdael: We do.

Rembrandt: And you are not filled with rage and bitterness?

Ruysdael: Why? The world only understands afterwards. (Pause.)

Rembrandt: That is true. I used to be bitter, but I am not now.

Ruysdael: It is getting cold. I am frozen.

Rembrandt: I don't know if I shall go to the town or not.

Ruysdael: I mustn't stop here any longer. The dampness will benumb my legs, and then I can't go on.

Rembrandt: That is torpor from the cold.

Ruysdael: You must be careful in this country.

Rembrandt: My torpor is from the heart.

Ruysdael: If ever you are near Harlem come to see me.

(They separate. Snow begins falling. Rembrandt stands watching Ruysdael out of sight.)

For me, who have seen the play magnificently acted by Deval, it is difficult to say whether the reader will be as deeply impressed as I was; no doubt the absence of the wintry picture, of the living voice, and (*nostra culpa*) above all of the music

of the original language, will somewhat detract from the effect. But I venture to submit that the passage is a very fair specimen of the powers of Messrs. Josz. and Dumur, and at the same time, I hope, a faithful and reverent translation into English.

Rembrandt's meeting with Ruysdael is as it were the curfew of his own fate. Once again he endeavours to mix the colours and to wield the brush, one more ray of sunshine falls into his gloomy abode, when Marguerite Tulp, who for years had supported him in secret, comes to bring him comfort and solace, but it is too late. His failing eyesight is culminating in blindness, and the conviction that henceforth he will be a helpless, hopeless, impotent wreck, breaks his heart. He offers his soul for a glimpse of light, but the words die on his lips. Thus, in the waning hours of the day, as the corpse lies outstretched on the bald floor in the lonely room, two undertakers enter :

The First: This must be the place.

The Second (touching the corpse): He is dead.

The First: What is his name?

The Second (reading a paper): Rembrandt van Ryn, painter.

The First (writing): Rembrandt van Ryn, painter. At the expense of the town. Cost, fifteen florins.

Finis

Such is the tragedy of Rembrandt—and its terrible moral, that no one is a prophet in his own country.

I full well know that I have given but a brief sketch of the play, and merely alluded to its literary merits. Nor was it my intention to do more. A work of this magnitude must not be spoilt by the patchwork of ordinary reviewing. It should be read, and, if there be a true artist on our stage, presented in the form for which it was moulded by the authors.

For "Rembrandt" is a play that will interest, elevate, and impress the public, not by mere preaching, but by the living portrayal of its leading character. It may not be flawless, for its dialogue often clamours for the pruning-knife, and its dramatic construction is episodical instead of firmly knit. But it will rank high as a work of art, because it unites literature and the drama in harmonious fraternity.

THE MANOEUVRES OF JANE.

Oct. 30. 1898.

The commanding general, the public, has pronounced the "Manoeuvres of Jane" a failure. For ten minutes the audience howled for the author, and if he had appeared, heaven knows what would have happened. The principal actors appeared time after time to pour oil on the seething waters; the managers, Messrs. Harrison and Maude, like Castor and Pollux, made their bow arm-in-arm, but it was all of no avail. The troops were scarcely at fault, but the tactics were clumsy and doomed to fail.

For a one-act play the subject would have been interesting enough, for the public always likes to behold a tomboy who has a firm little head of her own and a tender heart. But when the process of regeneration is spun out into five acts, or, to be precise, four acts and a scene of wordiness, in which there is neither much characterisation, nor action of engrossing interest, weariness is likely to set in, and no dialogue, however cleverly turned and twisted with occasional sparkles of real wit, will condone for the wasted time and energy. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, who always commands my respect, though I may not agree with him, as on this occasion (which, by the way, is the maxim of Jane's friend who manoeuvres with her), no doubt felt that this original idea of reforming a wayward girl would not fill an evening, and in order to sustain the interest, he conceived a double plot on a single line. First, there is Jane, who is sent to a lady friend to be tamed, and more particularly to be married to a noble; and secondly, there is her friend, a clever vixen, who has firmly made up her mind to conquer the title since Jane herself has long before promised herself to a young fellow of no means but of engaging manners. Up to

a certain point the manœuvres are interesting to follow. We have every sympathy with Jane's love affair, and even forgive her soundly shaking a nasty little minx who threatens to defeat her schemes by shameless eavesdropping; and although the politics of Constance, her friend, are not very pleasant or honourable, we feel inclined to say, "*Mon Dieu!* what won't people do to get into the holy state?" Yet when the troops are well on the march the tactics begin to fail, and the author resorts to reminiscences of his own plays to weave the thin thread of his story.

Thus we drift into the realm of "Rebellious Susan" and of "The Liars." The heroine, fearing that her marriage will be frustrated, steals away to a riverside inn, where she meets, and quarrels with, her lover, and the other girl manages to entangle his lordship into a little boating party, which results in a night out, and finally on their landing in a little coasting village. There, under the stress of circumstances, the engagement takes place, much against the will of his lordship—but particularly under the fascination of the lady's attractive wealth of dishevelled hair. It is not a very pretty scene, nor one to gladden the heart of Mistress Grundy. But as this is Jones and not Ibsen, we bury it and go on. Well, there is not much to tell after that. A few new characters are introduced and talk in order to keep the ball rolling, the father of Jane indulges in recriminations, but allows himself to be mollified, and the curtain descends upon two happy couples.

This is the whole story in a nutshell, and if I were offered the wealth of Croesus I could tell no more about it. For, to be frank, Mr. Jones, whose work is generally amusing, even if we have to join issue, has denied his audience the material for criticism. It is a mere "*conversazione*", incidentally pleasant, sometimes witty, with little side-lights of human nature which would be all the more effective if the *dramatis personæ* were less of the stage stagey; but on the whole too long—terribly long—and at times so diffuse that one would fain shout: "For mercy's sake, drop the talk and come to business!" This feeling of impatience pervaded the house soon after the

first act, which contained a charming love-scene between Jane and her sweetheart. And curiously enough, in this uneven play, whenever the action seemed about to be drowned in floods of verbiage, there was a snatch of pathos or of humour to spur the faltering interest.

But the last act sealed the fate of Jane and—alas!—of her manoeuvres. Mr. Jones is ever unhappy in his “actes à faire.” They have killed “Wealth,” imperilled “The Dancing Girl,” and lessened the career of “Judah.” In fact, “The Dancing Girl” was played in a foreign theatre, before my own eyes, shorn of its last act, and seemed a much better play than at the Haymarket. I am, therefore, inclined to believe that Mr. Jones, who is an excellent craftsman, and as earnest a writer for the stage as ever was, would be well advised to bridle his exuberance, and to practice concentration. For if “The Manoeuvres of Jane” has failed, it was not because the construction or the writing were of a mean order, but because the author failed to confine his action within reasonable bounds. In one act the play might have been a triumph; in three acts it would probably have held us gently to the last; but when it came to superfluity of talk distributed over five long tableaux, *ennui* seized the public. And we know from an old adage that human beings will forgive all sorts of things except boredom.

When a play founders, the actors are often included in the adverse verdict, unless they have given evidence of grand efforts. In this case I think the actors are nowise to blame, although there was nothing “flamboyant” in their performance. We have seen Miss Emery years ago in “Miss Tomboy,” and she merely repeats that charming performance. Miss Emery is always attractive as a lively young girl, and her Jane is no exception to the rule. Nor does she ever cause us to forget that she acts and, therefore, impersonates somebody, not herself. Mr. Cyril Maude, no less clever than his wife, makes the same impression. His caricatures (for Lord Bapchild is a caricature), are as amusing as the customs of *Vanity Fair*. But in real life his characterisations would be probably voted some-

what abnormal. The little vixen of Miss Beatrice Ferrar was a performance which gave immense pleasure to the audience, but I frankly own that I cannot entertain much sympathy for full-grown young ladies in short petticoats. There was something too deliberate in Miss Ferrar's portrayal of a disagreeable character, which I found jarring. Miss Gertrude Kingston, who is always a "femme du monde" to a fault, and rules the stage with incomparable assurance of a pleasant kind, made every effort to infuse some vitality into her part, but as Jane's friend was even less humanly drawn than Jane herself, she could not do much more than help to hold the piece together. Mr. C. M. Hallard was a fine and manly young swain; and Mrs. Brooke was a delightful old Lady Bapchild, who reminded us of the simple sixties when Society was less paragraphed than now-a-days. Miss Rose Leclercq, Mr. Frederic Harrison, Mr. Sydney Valentine, and Mr. Holman Clark were also included in the cast of notable players. But unless I were to indulge in the usual price-list adjectives: good, excellent, indifferent, &c., which are useless and unprofitable, I should really find nothing to say about these artistes; for their efforts were wasted on the futility of their task.

THE BROAD ROAD.

Nov. 6. 1898.

I wish I could praise Mr. Robert Marshall's new play without reserve. He is a promising novice, and his comedy, "His Excellency the Governor," has had a much shorter life than it deserved. Here is a man who is in earnest; who drives a finely pointed quill; who makes, at least, an effort to bring the drama within the boundaries of literature. But he is one of those writers who, like so many actors, yearn for serious creations, while his vein is entirely humorous. He has read tremendously; he knows his Feuillet ("Chamillac"); the Scribes and the Sardous he has studied profoundly; and as the master often influences the man, Mr. Marshall has tried to produce a play of intrigue of his own growth, inoculated, of course, by his models.

Mr. Marshall has also, I suspect, studied the modern writers of Scandinavia, and of the Theatre Libre, with their "atmospheric" literature, and their note-of-interrogation finales. And the result of this assimilation of the artificial and the realistic school, is a play of a nondescript character.

"The Broad Road" is very clever in parts, and if the third act were not such an unexpected avalanche of dramatic material, I should have found it deeply interesting. But, while during two acts there is a fine tension in the story of the Member of Parliament (if such there be) who, on the verge of ruin, throws in his lot with a card-sharper to retrieve his fortune, in the end the drama, instead of reaching a climax, sinks into utter meaninglessness. For what happens? The confederate, who is also the originator of the trickery, is about to be reclaimed by the love of a genuine woman, and to make a clean breast of his sin. And his desire is to lead his victim from the broad way into the narrow path of a better life. But

motives, unexplained, and therefore indefensible, prompt the guilty legislator to heap crime upon crime, and to mix a fatal cup for his seducer, who thus pays the extreme penalty of the law while the greater sinner, the man of rank, goes scot free.

Curiously enough, as I read over this brief epitome of the action, I find it far more dramatic than the play itself. The "donnée"—give me an English word for that if you can—is interesting, is forcible, and if Mr. Marshall had been a writer of experience, he might have made much of it. As it is, the play is unsatisfactory; it should have been a drama of characterisation, and it is merely one of incidents; it should have been palpitating with life, and at its best it is but coloured photography imperfectly finished. There are no such people as Mr. Marshall portrays, and, clever though the dialogue be, in life people don't say such carefully chiselled things as the author puts into their mouths.

For all that, "The Broad Road" is above the commonplace. The characters are characters of fiction. The language—except some flashes of exquisite spontaneous wit—is the language of the novel rather than the human dialogue of the drama. The story, in spite of its realistic "setting", is none too credible. Yet one feels all through that here is a writer who thinks and has something to say, and if his thoughts, at present, be governed by foreign influences, and his style vacillating between novel and play, he will some day—not very far hence—enrich our stage with material of more than ephemeral merit.

"The Broad Road" was acted on broad lines. And so it should be. Great subtleness would have spoiled it, and Mr. Martin Harvey, whose method is always delicate, not to say ethereal, was almost too subtle to grip as the repenting cheat. His performance was, however, very refined and discreet—out of the common, in fact, and worthy of praise. Miss Lena Ashwell is Mr. Harvey's kinswoman as an actress. She, too, is not very robust, nor very intense. But her personality is fascinating; her face quietly expressive; her manner, in spite of some little amateurish stolidity, attractive. The fault of over-acting is foreign to Miss Ashwell—she is likely to do the reverse; but

her calmness is pleasant and of excellent breeding. Theatrical clerics are mostly tedious, and Mr. Gilbert Farquhar was no exception to the rule; he is always monotonous, unctuous—"oily," the Americans call it—and spiritless. The burden of the play fell on Mr. Abingdon, and he carried it with heroic determination. That he did not make very much of the misguided M. P. was not his fault. The character was too much one of protestations, sobs, and sighs to allow a firm grip. But Mr. Abingdon is an able craftsman, and of the scanty material at his disposal he moulded a human entity which was almost acceptable.

There were others in the short cast of "The Broad Road," whom I pass over in silence, because they had little to do, or did it indifferently. But the play did not suffer much from its interpretation; it was throughout cordially greeted, for everyone wished to encourage the new author, whose first comedy was a success, and whose second effort will have taught him that his future really lies on the merry broad way of comedy.

T H E J E S T

Nov. 13. 1898.

Fancy, two poets flying twice within the space of three months towards the heights of Olympus, and coming down with their waxen wings singed and melted. Fancy a play that has been called "The Jest," and failed!

Why, the opportunities of the cheap humorist are simply colossal, and I am not at all so sure that your inordinate ambition, Messrs. Parker and Murray Carson, does not deserve all the derision to which it may be exposed. For whoever plays with poetry without being equipped with innate poesy, is as reckless as the child that tampers with the match-box.

Don't think, gentlemen, that I underrate your gifts, or wish to wound your feelings, when I offer you a word of counsel. It may seem harsh, but it is impartial and is meant for good. Let me beseech you to abandon this style of writing, for which you have neither the grip nor that poetic "panache" which is the one thing needed in poetic drama. And if you must persist in worrying the mediæval centuries, if you cannot get away from that siren which was Italy of the Medici, then for heaven's sake "supply the long-felt want," save a branch of national art, be the inspiring angels of our composers—write libretti. In this direction you may do yeoman service; you will amass fortunes (for our composers yearn for you) and build edifices of posthumous glory, while now you waste your gifts on ephemeral products that are neither good nor remunerative.

I am deeply in earnest, although I see you smile and hear you dub me a sea-fool; but I will tell you that the thing which killed your "Termagant," and kills your "Jest," is its absence of musical illustration. This sort of story is too flimsy to be

told; it should be sung; and with a composer of genius by your side, to infuse into your lines that which they want above all, deep, sound, vibrating emotion, your play would have made a splendid opera comique, which is quite a different thing from a comic opera.

You remind me, as I follow your work, of certain German playwrights of the eighties. They had one trifling idea of a plot in their minds, and with that material, scanty as it was, they sat down and wrote dialogue—wrote, wrote, until the three or four acts were complete, and the thing, strengthened by a dash of dramatic construction, had at least the outward appearance of a play. The truth was that they had nothing to say, and therefore talked a lot.

Such is your case, too, Messrs. Parker and Carson; you had really no story to tell—and, upon my word, I do not even know now where "The Jest" comes in—but as romantic drama is in good demand just now, and something à la Cyrano would make us Britons proud and happy, you met the demand. And in your play there is, indeed, the material for a nice little curtain-raiser, especially if it were told in flamboyant verse. For who among us would not listen with interest to the story of "Two is company and three is none," particularly if that story were neatly clad in Florentine gowns, and peopled with knights *à cape et à épée*. But when you fall into repetitions; when the little game between Cesare and Cosmo round the fair Fiorella halts, to be interspersed with noisy demonstrations of armed men and idle rambling of a demented poet, then it becomes tedious, and no mere words will console us—not even a soliloquy of nine and a half minutes in length, in which Cesare lays his soul bare to its very core. True, you have paved the way for a climax—and a very touching one it is—but, again, you spoil it by the voluminousness of your vocabulary. This is what happens: When Cesare has discovered that his wife's heart belongs to Cosmo, he determines to die. He struggles fiercely with his fate, but he pledges his word, as it were. He says to Cosmo, who is about to take a discreet departure, "When from on board you see this banner wafting, then come back!" The banner was

Cosmo's conquest, and his tribute to the fair Fiorella. When Cosmo is gone Cesare prepares to carry out his own doom. In the supreme moment his courage threatens to fail: then the mad poet plunges a dagger in his heart, "because he loves him so much." Wherefrom we learn that love has strange manifestations.

However, there lies Cesare, with death chilling his blood, and in one great effort of will he crawls towards the balcony and waves the banner. All this is tragic, and, for a moment, we feel the palpitations of stirred emotions. If it had ended there, one would have readily granted absolution for many shortcomings. But, as Mr. Parker has proved over and over again, he does not know when to stop; there is more to come. Cesare's agony must be prolonged till Fiorella kneels by his side, and Cosmo, the brave, bold, swift express-boy that he is, returns in two minutes from the sea, and then they mourn, all three, till our playwrights vouchsafe the *coup de grace*.

You can imagine our state of mind—an anticlimax: a comedian dying a tragic death; a pretty modern little lady gasping tearful words; and a thunderer like Mr. Kyrle Bellew bursting into woe and complaints. That settles it; it would have been a grand finale in opera, but it ends the play as if it were a tallow candle miserably snuffed out. And thus the failure is complete, in spite of many passages which were prettily written, and would have gained much if they had been well spoken.

I will not say anything against the Chief. I admire Wyndham—our premier comedian; I admire the pluck with which, in mature age, he has tackled such a part and come off unscathed. His pathos is not deep, and what his voice will not achieve he often tries to supply by a stamping foot or a swaying arm. But he is a master when it comes to be dashing, humorous, trenchant. And there is no man on our stage except Irving who could have ventured upon that terrible nine-and-a-half minutes speech without courting disaster. Wyndham got through, however, with infinite credit to himself, and if he did not move us by the accents of his passion, he conquered our warmest admiration by his grand display of elocution. He is

a master, and no mistake. Mr. Kyrle Bellew has a much more vigorous voice and physique than Mr. Wyndham, but he mistakes vigour for feeling. He poses and he slurs most of his words, and, however gracefully he may drawl out "Fiorella," as if it contained four l's and a mandoline to accompany the intonation, he cannot convince us that what he gives is good art. We want something more sincere and less turbulent nowadays than mere chromographic acting. Poor Miss Mary Moore, what shall I say about her? Pay her the compliment that she possesses the secret of perennial youth, looks the sweetest little fourteenth-century Florentine that ever came from modern England, and that her "Tut-tut" is the apotheosis of the tea and tennis girl. Yes; that I will say, and *verb. sap.*

Shall I mention a few others who figured in the cast and tell them..... But what is the good? They, on the stage, must have known what was the candid opinion of the audience of both the play and the acting. A Criterion night without the raising of the curtain after three acts is an unprecedented event. An unenthusiastic audience speaks volumes, and their coldness benumbs the players. Therefore, let us make ample allowances for the strugglers with thankless parts. They were in this case but the bricklayers, and if the structure tottered, it was due to the defective craft of the Master-Builders.

MAX NORDAU'S "Dr. KOHN."

Nov. 13. 1898.

Dr. Kohn is in love with the daughter of Mr. von Moser, a converted Jew, who married into an orthodox Christian family. The whole atmosphere of the play is strongly anti-Semitic; already in the first act we anticipate the fate that eventually befalls Dr. Kohn. The young lady remains true to him, but with this sole exception, he experiences nothing but race hatred and envy from his *fiancée's* brothers as well as from his colleagues, whom he has outrivalled by carrying off the prize in a mathematical competition. For this reason he has but poor chances of being appointed professor at the university of the small provincial town where he is installed as lecturer. To make matters worse, his application is dismissed by the Government upon the ground that the laws of the university do not admit of a Jew being appointed.

In spite of all this, fortified by the love of Christina, Dr. Kohn does not fear the struggle for life, and in the second act he asks her father's leave to marry her. Her father at first refuses, foreseeing the immense sensation which his return to Judaism would create among the members of his family and in the whole city. But in the end his love for the daughter, his favourite child, triumphs; he knows that she not only possesses all the virtues of a Christian, but also the staunch loyalty of the Jewish race. Thus the conflict with the father is, from the outset, merely a struggle on his part against convention and society. And, though failing in his endeavour to induce Dr. Kohn to turn Christian—the latter's parents being genuine Jews of the old stamp—the fond father is loth to break his child's heart.

The actual conflict of races breaks out when the mother, assisted by her two sons—one of whom is a hot-headed, imperious officer—and her brother—the true type of a parson *à la* Stoecker—interfere. They prove how deeply anti-Semitism is rooted in the hearts of the provincials, and we are not surprised to find that even the converted father is considered an outcast on sufferance by his own family. High words are followed by abuse and threats. The infuriated parson, in his fanaticism, forgets the fundamental principles of charity, the family ties are broken, and the officer violently assails the honour of his sister's suitor. Duel is inevitable, and in the unequal fight between the man of arms and the man of science, the latter is vanquished. Wounded to death, he is carried into the desolate house of Mr. von Moser; by his sick-bed weep his *fiancée* and his patriarchal parents, who, true to the traditions of their creed, scorn food and drink, and even the bed in a Christian man's house, because it is impure. Dr. Kohn succumbs to his wounds, and no sooner has he breathed his last, than his father claims his body, for he cannot possibly be buried from this house. The old Jewish couple are on the point of leaving, to mourn in their own house, but the terrible catastrophe has linked the sore hearts together, and Kohn's aged mother tenderly embraces Christina as though she were her own daughter.

At last Mr. von Moser is left alone with his child. When she is about to return to the death-bed, he implores her not to leave him; he has none but her left in this world. In spite of his conversion, he has ever remained a stranger to the Christians. Thus he says: "I was right in turning Christian, though, when I hear your uncle speak, I must almost doubt whether I was. When, however, I think of old Mr. Kohn, I am once more convinced of it. His is a different race, with whom I have nothing in common. And yet, though my soul is free, my flesh and blood belong to it, and this I ought to have impressed upon my children." Whereupon Christina bursts into these words, that not only end the play, but prefer as it were a sad charge against the originators of creed-hatred, in sobbing: "Oh, father, why do people wrong each other so!"

To understand to the full this latest work of Dr. Nordau, which has only just left the Press, it is almost essential that the reader should know something of the inner life of Germany. In that country anti-Semitism is not merely opposition to creed and race and capital; it is narrowed into a question of nationality. The Jew is a foreigner, he is the very antithesis of the "Deutschtum." Therefore he is a superfluous, a jarring element in society. Mr. von Moser, the convert, expresses this feeling again and again. His very apostasy is founded upon nothing else but this conviction. He did not forsake the creed of his fathers because he had ceased to believe in the dogma of the Old Testament. No; on the battlefield, in the seventies, when he fought for his country, and after the bloody day when the victorious soldiers burst out into Luther's greatest hymn, he had sat alone, away from the thanksgiving crowd, and in his solitude the chant awoke in him the feeling that he was a stranger to them all; not on account of his belief, but by reason of his birthright. And he felt it again, soon after, when before the walls of Paris the soldiers were celebrating Yule Tide around the Christmas tree, and he, the Jew, had no right to join the sacred merriment. Then, on that Christmas Eve, he determined that he would no longer be a pariah, he would be a German among Germans, and by the holy sprinkling redeem the stigma of his descent. But, no more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, can the Jew become Christian by conversion. He may strive never so hard; he may file off racial mannerisms to an almost imperceptible level; he may live a Christian among Christians, yet in his heart of hearts he will remain a stranger to his adopted race, and as a stranger he will be treated.

This character of Moser is powerfully and consistently drawn by Max Nordau; the blend of origin and assimilation is splendidly accomplished in the character of this man who is the incarnation of tender paternity, of introspection, of idealism combined with sound practical sense. He, not Kohn, is the indicter of the anti-Semitic craze; he and his daughter Christina, a pearl of womanhood, are the mightiest

weapons in the hands of Nordau. For Kohn, himself, endowed though he may be with all the virtues of his race, weakens the plea in favour of the Jews, when he admits that he is only a Jew on racial grounds—not a believer in his God or in the doctrines of his religion. He refuses to save the peace of the Moser family by becoming a Christian, for two reasons, one of which, his reverence for his parents, is admissible. But the other, the pride of his descent, will not pass muster, at least not as it is put in this tragedy, when it entails the hopeless break-up and destruction of an entire family. All the fine speeches in the world, and he delivers a good many, will not free him from the charge that by his non-belief he has ceased to be a true Jew. And if he be put forward, as he undoubtedly is by Nordau, as a martyr for the sake of the Jewish cause, it cannot be said that the characterisation was happy. Rather give me a modern Uriel Acosta—such as may still be found in the inner circles of pious Jewish families; martyrs must be made of stern stuff, and belief must be their cardinal virtue.

On the other hand, the Christians in the play are drawn from the narrowest, most unforgiving, most unchristian bigots that ever walked this planet. Such a Christ-forsaken lot, which spurts the foulest mud of intolerance upon the supreme teaching of "Love thy neighbour," it is hard to conceive. Yet, alas! there are such, and it is they who on the one hand preach the gospel, and on the other exhort to a crusade against their brethren before God. But suppose that Mrs. Moser and her son and the unspeakable parson were drawn from the midst of life in modern Germany, would they, as contrasts, further the plea of Dr. Nordau? I say emphatically, no. If this were a mere play for the stage, one might judge otherwise; but this is a controversial play, a philippic in dialogue, and in order to do justice there should have been a right balance. All the weight of right and virtue is thrown into the Jewish scale—all the offal of intolerance and narrow-mindedness falls in that of the Christians. The result is obvious. The author must be charged with special pleading. If, on the contrary, in juxtaposition to those Christian

Jews, and those unchristian Christians, Nordau had but placed one firm, wholesome, tolerant specimen of Gentile, who would have been, as it were, an intervener in the fierce conflict of the characters, the final impression would have been different. Now, the Jews will be dissatisfied, because their moral victory in this play has been made all too easy and unconvincing; and the Christian will protest, because his fellow-believers have been painted in the darkest colours.

Again, as a play pure and simple, "Dr. Kohn" will scarcely be pronounced flawless. The denouement ends, but does not solve the question; the composition is altogether artless; here and there an attempt at manoeuvring with several characters, but generally a string of dialogues, long-winded if mostly culminating in real drama. Yet if Nordau, the great and vigorous essayist, overpowers Nordau the dramatist, as is the case in all his plays, it would be unfair to deny to this remarkable work some vitality before the footlights. It is Ibsenish in its simplicity, if not so adroitly structured as Ibsen would have done it; and some of the qualities of the great Norwegian are not wanting. I mean to say, that although nearly every character is a born polemist, not an ordinary human creature of a distinct personality, every word they utter is worth listening to, every line is pregnant with significance and thought. In fact, it is no exaggeration to assert, that in one single page of Nordau there is more depth than in an entire act of any modern English play which has found its way into print. And by this very quality the tragedy, in spite of its overflow of philosophy, of imagery, of argument, in spite also of portions which are wholly undramatic, has earned its right to live upon the stage. At times the grip is immense, and I for one felt riveted to my chair, as I read of the terrible struggle between Moser, Christine, and Kohn on the one side, and the infuriated Jew-baiters in the opposite camp. Whether the tragedy of "Dr. Kohn" would prove acceptable on the stage of England, I do not venture to conjecture. It is essentially a non-commercial drama, and as such (because it belongs to the domain of literature rather than to that of stage-craft) I fear no manager, not even an actor-ma-

nager, is likely to touch it. Moreover, so long as anti-Semitism has not poisoned the minds of our nation, it is perhaps best to let well alone. But the student of dramatic literature should not neglect Dr. Nordau's latest production, for its stimulating power is abundant, and every scene vibrates with deep emotion.

JOBMASTER HENSCHEL.

Nov. 20. 1898.

Gerhardt Hauptmann's Triumph.

"Le laid c'est le beau."—HUGO.

Young Germany's Titan, Gerhardt Hauptmann, has produced a new play, and "Jobmaster Henschel" is its title.

A fortnight ago, when all Berlin lived in feverish expectation, (for love of art is bred in the bone of every German) there were many in the Deutsches Theatre who had come to scoff, as is usual in that city of literary strife and revolution. But before the evening was half over, the mastermind had forced his opponents to their knees, and when the last word had been spoken, there was one unbroken outburst of approval, and ere long the electric spark sent salutes of joy all over the German realm, in that a new stripling of genius had seen the light.

In one word, it was a triumph as complete as that of "Cyrano," yet greater, because its factors were of the utmost simplicity. No verse, no flights into regions of exalted prose, no splendour of cloth and clothes, no rhetoric and no fireworks, but an everyday story of mean life told in commonplace language by mortals of uncouth manners and scant culture. And the wonder was all the greater since the tale was not even unfolded in pure German—the dialogue was, as in "The Weavers", in the Silesian tongue, and therefore probably Greek to many hearers; yet the firmness with which the action was handled overpowered all foreign influences and held the audience spell-bound.

Of course, all this is but a report founded on hearsay and on the countless criticisms in the German Press, for, alas! I had to be content to follow the performance from afar, with nothing but the cold print of the book and my poor imagination to comfort me.

But the reading of the play has made me alive to its

greatness, and never before have I so keenly felt the truth of the dogma that simplicity is the highest form of artistic expression. Not even Ibsen in "Ghosts" has been more true to life; nor has any one of the French realists obtained the same result which Hauptmann has with so few strokes of the pen; for the whole play, with its five acts, covers only 100 small pages, but in that limited space there lies a world. The story is unpleasant. Here the censors of our morals, who revel in "Pink Dominoes" and plays of necks and limbs, would have burst out into lamentations and invectives if the woeful tragedy of "Jobmaster Henschel" had been acted. But, thank God, in Germany bold treatment of life in all its phases is not condemned as inartistic. There the artist may flash his search-light in all directions, in the highest walks of life as well as in the lowest, and no one will belittle him for his choice, provided what he give be—to quote Jean Jullien—"a chapter of life presented artistically."

About the value of "Jobmaster Henschel" there can be no two opinions. It approaches nature itself in its veracity—and that is very nearly the highest the human mind may hope to accomplish.

* * *

The birds on the housetops chirped it to one another, but "Jobmaster Henschel" was as deaf as a post and as blind as a bat.

He had married the second Mrs. Henschel, his former servant, because she was a buxom girl, because she was clean and practical, because she knew how to deal with the pence and the pounds.

She had wriggled herself cleverly into the exalted position. When Mrs. Henschel the first was alive, she worked hard, made herself useful, and had quietly curried favour with her master by her devotion and her little coquetry in baring a plump and rosy arm. Mrs. Henschel was abed with a babe, while Hanne did the household work and tended the master when he came home tired from the jobs with the horses and the carts.

Mrs. Henschel saw what was quietly going on and grew jealous; but what could she do, poor thing, on the verge of death

with puerperal fever? So she complained to others, and, before her death, induced her husband to promise that he would never marry again, and above all not Hanne. He scorned the very idea, but he had just bought Hanne a new apron and a cap.

As soon as the coffin was out of the house, Hanne became active. She had had lovers, she had a lovechild somewhere in the country, but now it behoved her to be clever, and, pending the approaching proposal, she practised virtue and economy.

The game succeeded, and Henschel, lonely, sorrowful, yearning for an arm to lean on, also unhappy in business, overcame his scruples against the *mésalliance*, and was slowly drawn into the trap. He was a good soul, a man of few words, and his proposal was as prosy as his humdrum daily life in the basement of the stables.

Once at the helm, Hanne goes apace. She has intrigues with Tom, Dick and Harry; orgies take place in Henschel's rooms when he is on night jobs. The little child of her predecessor dies—heaven knows why or how—and when Henschel in his goodness brings her her own little girl to surprise her, she is rough and rude to it. She is altogether a creature of cunning and lust.

Henschel is miserably perturbed; his dead wife haunts him, he broods over his baby's untimely death, he is unhappy and finds no comfort at home. Hence he frequents the beer-house, and there, as insinuations of all sorts float in the air, a light penetrates the dimness of his intellect. At first he refuses to believe, bullies the insinulators, shows fight and threatens violence (the beer-house scene is of great force) but the brother of his first wife convinces him, for "don't the birdickins chirp it from the housetops?" And from the awful glare of light he tumbles into the pitch darkness of despair. He is a wreck. He wakes at night and wanders. Yet he has not spoken, but the end must come, he cannot live with this wanton; one of them must go, and one night in the small hours he hurls his accusations into her face, her duplicity, her immorality, her murder of the babe. She defends herself with all her might, but her protestations are so many avowals of guilt. And while she,

frightened at the man's anger and strange ways, runs for the neighbours, he, in an adjoining room, ends his misery with the knife.

* * *

If my account of the drama has achieved what I intended—to give a clear outline of the main characters without reference to byework and collateral figures, I shall feel satisfied that the reader will, to some extent, have been able to gauge the power of this heartrending chapter of human suffering. But what I never could nor would venture to attempt, is to convey the tremendous effect of Hauptmann's language. Every line teems with life, a simple sentence—as, for instance, Mrs. Henschel's muttering on her deathbed, "Yet he has bought her that apron", is full of tragic meaning. There is never a word too much—I would fain say that for some there are far too few—but this scantiness of vocabulary, these broken off, halting, spasmodic phrases are overwhelming in their vigour. It is as if we sat with these people in their room, silent witnesses of their doings. We are part and parcel of their lives, and although there is no straining after effect or working for telling "curtains;" the tension is so great that it almost produces discomfort. What it must have been, superbly acted as it was in Berlin, can only be conjectured.

Here, then, is a play entirely founded on characterisation. Every one, from Henschel and Hanne down to the little girl who says but a few syllables, has a distinct personality, and where the author has not found his words sufficient, he has given such minute stage directions, that the figures seem to rise from the paper, as if called to life by enchantment. I dislike quotations, as they are mostly a mutilation of the author's work; but to illustrate the method of Hauptmann, I will just mention his stage-direction, when Hanna in the second act plays her game. Of course she is demure, that is part of her scheme; she says that the people are beginning to talk about her, a young girl, living alone in rooms with Henschel. She speaks of going away. He says, "Go along, you are not in your senses." Then Haupt-

mann interpolates. "Hanne stands upright, holding her apron before her eyes, crying crocodile tears."

It will be said that Hauptmann's talent is morbid—that he sees but one side of life, the seamy side; that he has no eyes for things high and noble. And no doubt to some extent the plaint is justified. The note of despair echoes throughout all his works, from "Vor Sonnenaufgang" to his fairy tale "Die Versunkene Glocke," and that denotes perhaps the limitations of his powers, although he stands as yet at the beginning of his career, for he has barely reached mature manhood.

But this limitation of his horizon is the main cause of his strength. Others, less profound, and more audacious, essay to picture life in all its aspects, with the fatal result that, like Sudermann in "Die Ehre," they fail to see it steadily and to see it whole. Hauptmann, for the time being, scorns universality. He concentrates his lines upon the one fragment of humanity which he knows to the very marrow. He deals with the peasantry of Silesia, whence he hails, and the populace of Berlin, where he lives. The nature of these petty folks, their form of speech, their inner life, have no secrets for him. And as truly and completely as he sees them does he also reproduce them—real human beings throbbing with life and passion.

In the face of such creative greatness, criticism of minor details is silenced. For the first duty of a critic towards the author of something new and great, is not so much to point out minor blemishes, as to shout, until all men are looking that way: "Behold! a Master!"

THE REAL THEATRICAL ORPHANAGE.

Nov. 27. 1898.

An appeal to Mr. Passmore Edwards.

SIR,—When England's philanthropy in the nineteenth century has been summed up by history, your name will be handed down to posterity as one of the benefactors of the people. The work which you have done by your institutes, your public libraries and your homes, is immense. It is admirable.

Still, although the gift of a paltry thousand sterling by a City magnate is heralded by a flourish of trumpets, oftentimes, too, rewarded with titles and orders, you are but a poor prophet in your own country. Your munificence is belittled, obscured, relegated in our large newspapers to small-print corners, and while others are praised on all hands, your name is hardly ever pronounced with enthusiasm.

It is not for me to explain this anomaly, for whispers and rumours have no influence upon my admiration of your record. But if I were called upon to criticise the merits of your benevolence, I would say that, in embracing the community at large, you sometimes fail to build your works upon such solid grounds as would ensure their perennial vitality. In other words, you are too prone to worship the Bismarckian principle of "*do ut des*" instead of establishing a limited number of institutions with sufficient endowments. For this reason Islington has rejected your munificence, and recently the dramatic profession has courteously declined your offer to provide an orphanage unless its maintenance were otherwise ensured. I am inclined to the belief that this gilded pill of a rebuff must have been bitter to you, but I am certain that for all parties concerned the decision arrived at was the right

one, as the profession is sufficiently remunerated for its work to provide collectively for its own orphans, and your generosity can be better employed in other directions for the benefit of the theatrical world.

For, Sir, if ever there was an orphan crying for shelter, it is not the stripling of some needy British actor or artist, but the British drama itself.

Look at its pitiful condition now. The State, its lawful parent, refuses to recognise its existence, while it patronises the sister arts of music and painting. The public, its godparents, allow it, like a light-o'-love, to become a prey to the first moneyed speculator who desires to have his way with it. The managers, its self-appointed guardians, ill-use it for purposes of self-glorification, of commercial traffic, of maid-of-all-workdom, entirely disregarding its vocation and its possibilities.

What is the result of all this?

Simply this, Sir, that at the present moment the English stage is inferior in every respect, with the exception of decorative art, to that in every other civilised country of Europe; that it is on the level of any tradesman's wholesale providing store; that it is an instrument of the few to submerge the great crowd of workers who have adopted the theatre as their profession; that it does not ennoble; that it does not educate; that it does not elevate the nation in its leisure hours; that by its system it stifles the growth of budding talent; that by its subservience to personal ambitions it closes the gates of Great Britain to the young generation from abroad, which is appealing to us in vain.

Do not say, Sir, that I exaggerate. For I do not, and if I could have the privilege of a conversation with you, I feel sure that I could convince you that we, in the mightiest city of the world, are (from a theatrical point of view) deeply and sadly behind the theatres of the Continent.

To be short: We know what happens on the boulevards of Paris, and beyond that we know nothing or next to nothing. For Ibsen is performed in theatres "à cote"—Bjornstjern is not acted at all. Hauptmann, Sudermann, Rosmer, Brieux, Schnitzler—save me the trouble of naming a galaxy of celebri-

ties—are to our public but names (names to flourish at times) and nothing else. They are unread, unappreciated, unacted, for they are not “favourites,” as they call them on the turf, of one hundred nights or more.

And this, Mr. Passmore Edwards, brings me to the point of my appeal. I would beg you to do what I and hundreds and thousands with me would thank you for till the end of our days.

For once let your benevolence blend with your love for art; enfranchise our drama from the degradation of commercialism, by endowing a theatre—one single theatre in the whole of Great Britain—where Thalia, unswayed by personal or financial interests, shall reign supreme; where plays shall be produced on the strength of their intrinsic merits, not on account of their possibilities for “star”-acting; where English plays shall sometimes give place to the work of foreign writers.

All I struggle for is the freedom of our dramatic art; the widening of our narrow horizon; the recognition of our artists, who are kept in the background by actor-managers, patented leading ladies, widely “billed” star-actors; and opportunities for those who are willing to work, have talent, and are handicapped by the vices of the present system.

It would be well, I think, to entrust the management of our Endowed Theatre, to the care of a first-rate critic as Berlin did in the case of Paul Schlenther; or, again, to a distinguished play-writer, as the Comedie Française did in the case of Jules Claretie, but for the dramatist entire abstinence of production for the theatre he governs would have to be obligatory. At a pinch we might even give the management of the Endowed Theatre to an actor of renown, provided that he be content to govern and to renounce acting.

If the thing is to be done, it should be done on a liberal scale. One of the best houses in London should be secured; one of the best companies engaged for no mere “run” or season, but for a period of at least three years; scene-painters should be attached to the house, and in every centre of Continental Europe men of letters should be engaged to secure the best work for London’s Endowed Theatre and its offshoots.

But the details of the project are of later importance. The principal point is: Are You, Mr. J. Passmore Edwards, prepared to establish the orphanage, which our theatre is really in need of? are you prepared to risk a small fortune to rescue the drama in the land of Shakespeare from the quicksands of speculation into which it is fast submerging?

If so generations of players, playwrights, and playgoers will honour your name as the liberator of the commerce-ridden English Stage.

TWO LITTLE MAIDS FROM SCHOOL.

Nov. 27. 1898.

Often, when I cross the Channel, and the winds whip the waters into fury, I go down on the lower deck to watch the engines. Undisturbed, these giants do their work; the double pistons rise, launch out, plunge down into the cylinder, in mathematical exactitude, whether the ship be pitched and tossed, whether the waves rise sky-high, or roll onward in tremendous curves. There is a sameness in these ceaseless revolutions which is akin to monotony, yet the eye does not tire, for there is also a majesty in the stolid labour of the steely giants which rivets the mind and inspires respect..... It seems strange that this maritime reflection should open my discourse upon a play, a harmless comedy to boot, which has nothing at all in common with puissant waves and powerful engineering. Yet there is some analogy between the two, for as I sat in the Theatre Metropole, and followed the skilful development of "*Les Demoiselles de St. Cyr*," pleasantly anglicised by Mr. Robert Buchanan and Miss Harriet Jay ("*Chas. Marlow*"), I was involuntarily driven to compare the work of the great Dumas with the machinery of a liner. He, too, manipulated coolly, collectedly, methodically, like a piston-rod, upon a solid system; he, too, heeded nothing, and carried out his ideas in disregard of all outward circumstances; he, too, monotonous though his plays may become on account of the similarity of their thought and construction, commands respectful admiration for the product of his genius and his craftsmanship.

And if some reader should still demur at the comparison, may I remind him of the main traits of the story of the play, which bears its old age of half a century with youthful grace. Are not the two loving couples, who become united after much

skirmishing and ingeniously-contrived tribulations, as perfectly engineered as machinery? On the one side we have the bashful maiden and the dashing swain; on the other the delightfully impudent little witch and her timorous wooer, who, until she humoured him, would not say *bo* to a goose. Now, in every movement these two couples follow the same principle, invisibly prompted as it were by the law of the parallelogram of forces. It takes them a long time to reach the desired goal; there is plenty of pitch and toss of incident, plenty of attempted lingering and rolling off the right course, but the action steadily forges ahead, and those who understand the secrets of dramatic construction enjoy the amazing cleverness of the mechanism.

But the whole thing is artificial, some one will exclaim.

Granted! artifice pure and simple. But mark how cunning our Dumas was. He took good care not to lay his story in his own times, as he might well have done, for this kind of plot belongs to all ages. But he draped it in the costume and the flowery speech of the eighteenth century, which may be considered as the very cradle of artificiality. And thus we are more or less disarmed—or rather we are beguiled into the belief that these mannikins are real fragments of last century humanity, and as it is all very pretty and witty, amusing and pleasing to the eye, we scarcely hear the jerks and the groans of the wheelwork, unless the actors play in too modern a key.

Such was undoubtedly the case at the Metropole, but the play was fascinating all the same; and although the plot had been somewhat watered, and the dialogue had lost some of its French piquancy, it was a very creditable adaptation—a very masterpiece compared with the doleful abortions that infest West and Suburban London. Wherefore, I say, with my friend Spence, why commit the impropriety of adapting other people's novels, when these people have done it so much better themselves?

Having so far given the author and the adapters their due, I must place the pleasant fact on record that no little of the success of the evening was the result of Miss Annie Hughes'

exquisite performance. Here is a consummate comedienne indeed, and one who—thanks to our system of actor-managers and compulsory leading ladies—has never yet been allowed to fill the place which befits her talent and her intelligence. I do not hesitate to declare that Miss Annie Hughes in "Sweet Nancy," and now in "Two little Maids," has given two of the best comedy performances I can remember. It is almost a matter for regret that she was not entrusted with the main part in "A Marriage of Convenience," "The Silver Key," or in "Lady Ursula." For she knows how to act Dumas, and, generally, plays à la Dumas, which implies that the graces of the eighteenth century have no secrets for her. You should have seen her, so frolicsome and so coy, so airy and so tender; it was a joy from beginning to end, and there was not a line which did not receive its full value. It must be owned that everybody else suffered through Miss Hughes' distinct superiority, even Miss Winifred Fraser, who is a charming and dainty actress, but just lacks that touch of lightness essential in a play of this kind. For lightning acting is the alpha and omega of success in Dumas' comedies, and Mr. Acton Bond, for instance, whose memory played him false to an alarming degree, so that he was constantly handicapped in his search for words, played with so much deliberation that the comedy almost turned into ponderous drama. Of course, one should make allowances for hasty study, and I know full well that Mr. Bond is a painstaking and interesting actor, but his uncertainty on the first evening seriously imperilled the play. If Mr. Bond was too slow, Mr. Leslie Kenyon was too fast and furious; I mean, he was boisterous and indistinct where he ought to have been demure and very simple. Towards the middle of the second act he improved, and, if his Dubouloy (which everybody pronounced as "Djeubooloy," as they pronounced *mauvais sujet* "movay soujay," which is not French, but Chinese) in clown's attire was more *fin de siècle* than A.D. 1700, it was a very agreeable performance. The great gifts of the imposing Miss Alma Stanley were entirely wasted on a part of no words and mere posturing. Miss Stanley is another actress of sterling me-

rits whom the commercial system prevents from progressing. She would be, next to Miss Leclercq, the best Duchess in "Le Monde ou l'on s'ennuie" one could find in England; and when the play is produced here it will be a thousand pities if she does not have an opportunity of achieving the success of her career.

I find nothing in particular to say about other members in the cast. They all meant well, and worked with zest, which is half the battle. The other half can only be won by practice in plays of artistic refinement, under the guidance of accomplished stage-managers; and to find either in our average theatres it would be indispensable to recover the lantern of the late lamented Mr. Diogenes (to say nothing of the famous funnel of Nuremberg).

THE BRIXTON BURGLARY.

11 Dec. 1898.

What it was all about?

If you want to know ask a policeman, and I am not sure that he will know. But it was delightful; and the evening was so full of fun and joy and laughter that the tears streamed down our cheeks. Of course, at the bottom of it all was Ananias, a whole tribe of Ananiases, "the finest liars I ever met," as the delightful Annie Hughes put it. They had all been to Brixton—The Master—the Man—the Maid—the Father-in-law. And unfortunately there had been a burglary at Brixton. And they all had good reasons to keep their night's escapades in the dark.

Not that they had been naughty. Oh, dear. no! I would take my little daughter of twelve to see this funny play, if I had one. It is as innocent as driven snow; well, no; not quite so innocent; let us say, as innocent as the snow which has been lying on the clean ground for a day.

For after all, the master had been on the razzle-dazzle with two aerial queens, "The Bounding Sisters," while he ought to have been home and in bed awaiting the return of his dear wife.

But what married man has not had, or has not tried to have, or would not have given his head to have had the pluck to try to have, supper with aerial or terrestrial queens for once in his life? (Don't speak all at once.) Well, and the man—the valet—had been to a party in his master's clothes. The maid had donned bloomers, and left her master's bike in the clutches of the police. The father-in-law had also transgressed the law by riding without a light, and having been in collision with the afore-said maid, fled from the vengeance of Nemesis.

And now in the early hours, with the wives coming home with torn clothes, head-aches, and aching consciences, the quartette

lie to one another in order to explain away the black spots of that terrible night.

Alas! murder will out! The police are on the scent and on the premises; there are cross-examinations, arrests, flights, suspicious wives, and above all, more lies. In fine, at the end of the second act the tangle is such that, laughing as we are, we are wondering how the dickens Mr. Fred. W. Sydney, the clever author, will ever manage to get into clear waters.

But he does, and at length, as neatly as a cat dropped from a balcony, the play comes down on all fours.

The charm of this buoyantly clever piece of dramatic construction is that the humour is scarcely ever forced, although it was perhaps superfluous to show us Mr. James Welch in the chambermaid's frocks. From beginning to end the author sticks to his guns, and, however much we may feel at sea, he knows where he is steering to. Moreover, in spite of a welcome absence of manufactured epigrams, the dialogue is not only fresh, but at times it sparkles with little gems of wit that literally dazzle the house. For Mr. Sydney is evidently endowed with a pair of excellent eyes, and equally good ears, and what he absorbs with both he knows how to reproduce with much power of condensation. Briefly, his farce is good work, and ought to prove a gold reef to the management.

The actors, too, deserve their places in the run of glory: Annie Hughes, James Welch, Ferdinand Gottschalk—what a splendid “triumvirfeminate”; and to be quite just, we should not forget the excellent, jolly, and obliging policeman of Mr. Victor Widdicombe, nor the unctuous father-in-law of Mr. J. H. Barnes.

But James Welch, one of the cleverest, most intelligent, and best read of our young actors, was *facile princeps*. You may find his grief-stricken facial contortions at times somewhat overdone, but you cannot get away from the irresistible humour, the tremendous energy, the fine “savoir-faire” of the little man. He is the ideal husband in a funk, and his every word and movement are funny, without ever leaning to vulgarity. Mr. Welch, who has been a hard worker from the be-

ginning of his career, is one of our first comedians.

What I think about Miss Hughes has been said on the occasion of her recent appearance at Camberwell. I emphasise every word of it now. Her chambermaid was a charm—"a bit of old Chelsea" worth remembering. ,

As for Mr. Ferdinand Gottschalk, I should like to see him play *Mascarille*. He has the gift of the "grands valets" so essentially identified with Coquelin, and his "James" in "*The Brixton Burglary*" was the artful dodger to the life.

The other ladies had less important parts, so it is difficult to speak about them. But Miss Hobson promises well in farcical plays, if her laugh were only as fascinating as her appearance. She ought to learn how to do it, for a forced laugh is a discord. Perhaps she might one day let her understudy play *Mrs. Green*, and herself take a seat "in front." For "*The Brixton Burglary*" is a very school for laughter.

MILORD SIR SMITH.

Dec. 18. 1898.

They applauded, but they all said that it was not good. Anomaly? No. Simply a correct appreciation. Why should one hiss or boo when a popular comedian mistakes the intellectual thermometer of his audience, and, after a prolonged absence from London, still believes that girls in bathing costumes, spicy songs, humour of a none too delicate order, and a topical atmosphere withal, are indispensable to raise the quicksilver of musical-comedy enthusiasm. After all, Mr. Arthur Roberts worked like a Hercules, donned I don't know how many dresses, invented lots of business, gagged his part when his customary first-night nervousness betrayed his memory, sang, danced, jumped—did all, in fact, to whip a dead horse into life, and an English audience always admires the courage of a man who fights manfully for a lost cause. They also felt sympathetically inclined towards Miss Ada Reeve, who is as nearly a gay Parisienne as the cockney soil will produce. She is wonderfully vivacious; she sings neatly, albeit she warbles of "Llove me just a lllittle, don't be shshshy, Sssue," which is, perhaps, Welsh for love, little, shy, and Sue. But that is probably the evil influence of the music-hall, and could be easily corrected by a clever teacher like Madame Oudin. For the material of Miss Reeve is rich, and with her own little self she does more for a play than half-a-dozen Gaiety graduates together. Mr. Robert Nainby, another Frenchman of the Thames, is also very amusing; somebody should give this excellent actor a prominent comedy part, for he and Mr. de Lange are inimitable in their grotesque delineations of French types. Among the other people that crowded the stage, and mostly did no more than that, there was a little, bright-faced young girl, Miss Kate

Worth, who had already attracted my attention, in "The Topsy Turvy Hotel." Neither then nor now was her task of much importance—it was more or less a pirouetting round the principal characters. But how well she did it, with her pretty and intellectual features all aglow with mirth, and her graceful figure in perpetual motion and excitement! Is it refreshing to discover such a vivacious little actress among the wooden show-dolls of the chorus, and I should not be at all surprised if Miss Worth one of these days became one of the "divettes" of the musical comedy stage.

I have so far said very little about the play, and perhaps I am right. It is a case of least said soonest mended, particularly when we remember that no less than four librettists have cooked so poor a broth. It is a *rechauffé* of all the "Girls" that have seen life since "The Gaiety Girl" opened the ball. The story—or what there is of it—is as old as the hills, and I dare say I am not the only one who is tired of the flirting baronet, and the music-hall belle, the bathing-machines and the Casino. Frankly it is tedious business, quite unworthy of the pleasing musical gifts of Mr. Jakobowski, who in this case has made light of his work and drawn upon his repertoire, and that of Strauss, Millocker, and Suppé. But Mr. Jakobowski is a first-rate manufacturer of the catchy tunes which a German critic once dubbed "tra-la-la-la music." Nearly all his melodies are full of verve and dexterously scored, so they please the crowd, and as to the result, "*cela va sans dire*"—as goes the refrain of one of the most applauded couplets.

THE RESIGNATION OF MR. CLEMENT SCOTT.

Dec. 18. 1898.

Often in life, when the hour of parting comes, antagonism changes as by magic into kindly feeling; old feuds are forgotten; bitter words, only too easily uttered in the heat of contention, lose their sting; and whereas yesterday one was ready to condemn, there reigns to-day only the desire to honour and to tender the olive branch.

Such were my reflections when, late in the evening of last Sunday, I heard that Mr. Clement Scott had decided to relinquish the post of dramatic critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, which he has held for a score of years or more.

For Mr. Clement Scott is young yet, young in mind and in body, too young to cover his retirement by the pretext of progressing years and waning force. There must be reasons of grave importance which have determined him to relinquish the commandership of dramatic criticism in London. Perhaps the deplorable article of 1897, when an indiscreet interviewer transplanted fireside prattle about actresses' morality into the columns of *Great Thoughts*; perhaps Mr. Scott's recent philippic against histrionic laziness and gambling proclivities was at the root of it. Perhaps cabal. For our dramatic planets love the azure of praise and resent the clouds of censure.

But that is no business of mine. Clement Scott goes, and I wish to dwell upon the importance of his retirement from his conspicuous position.

His record is a brilliant one. For he was a worker, and until the year 1889 he was not only in the vanguard of dramatic progress, but he was, indeed, the man who had the power and the influence to spur our playwrights and our players alike. He has brought our stage in contact with the French geniuses of the

third quarter of this century, Augier, Dumas fils, Sardou ; although he did not protest against, even aided and abetted, our vicious system of adaptation (did he not bowdlerise 'Dora' and other plays under the pseudonym of Savile Rowe?), and he never ceased to extol the qualities of native plays, even though his praise went often far beyond their merits. On the other hand, he has given no evidence of catholicity beyond the encouragement of the French drama ; the German school—probably because the language was unfamiliar to him—found no support in him ; and when the Scandinavian made its entry with the problem play, when our own Pinero followed suit with "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," Clement Scott lost his balance. The man of progress of yesterday became a man of retrogression, and it is not unfair to lay at his door the accusation that he is mainly responsible for the apathy of our managers towards the young generation that has successfully roused all Europe, except England.

Thus, it is not as critic of plays that Clement Scott's name will shine in the history of our modern stage ; he was too conservative for that, for, unlike other and greater minds than himself, he proved himself unable to accept the great lesson of life, that advancing age should not oppose the current of progress.

But it is as a judge of actors and acting that Clement Scott's activity on the *Daily Telegraph* will be remembered. Among all the men who have wielded the sceptre of criticism, there has been no one in these last five-and-twenty years who equalled him in experience and thoroughness of knowledge in this department. When he was not led away by personal prejudice for or against an artist (as, alas, has frequently been the case, particularly since his own position had become harassed and uncertain) his judgment was as admirable as it was sound. He has brought many artists to the fore ; he has fortified many in their position ; and some reputations, founded on nepotism, advertisement, or social standing, have suffered at his hands. Often, too, his hand has fallen heavily on beginners, and in his severity he has, perhaps, crushed many a career which might have been crowned with success but for this first rough

blow. But, generally, as far as acting is concerned, Clement Scott has done yeoman service ; for, brought up as he had been in the days when diction, elocution, and deportment were far more diligently studied, when hard work was the rule on the stage, and long runs were things unknown, he was relentless towards those who looked upon their calling as a mere pastime, and indulgent only towards such as were in earnest.

On the whole, Clement Scott has, therefore, deserved well of our stage, has done much which has stamped itself firmly upon the dramatic annals of the time. To deny this, to denounce with a flourish of trumpets on the day of his retirement what have been his faults, his weaknesses, and his prejudices, would be ungracious and ungrateful.

Uninfluenced for the nonce by what he has written to arrest the fulfilment of my ambitions and my ideals, nor anticipating his attitude in the future, I have welcomed this opportunity to thank him for his good work on the daily Press, and to proffer a conciliatory hand with every good wish for a mellow autumn to his arduous life.

THE DRAMA IN 1898.

Dec. 31. 1898.

Experiments and Achievements.

Like a torrent last year's events in our theatrical world rush through my memory, and most of them deserve no better fate than to swell the ocean of oblivion. In other words, it has been a year of much cry and little wool, and its salient features might well be summarised in a few concise sentences.

I note but four points of paramount importance. First, the continued success of Shakespeare revivals; secondly, the advent of John Oliver Hobbes as a playwright; thirdly, the manifestation of November 3 at Her Majesty's Theatre; fourthly, the resignation of Mr. Clement Scott. Everything else pales in comparison with these factors, and even the renaissance of Dumas Père's plays is of minor importance, since the purpose of this review is to deal with the work of our own soil.

I need hardly dwell at length on the productions of "Julius Cæsar" at Her Majesty's and of "Much Ado about Nothing" at the St. James' Theatre. Both were well-intentioned performances, pictorially excellent, and interesting from a critical point of view; but while Mr. Alexander deserves encouragement for his efforts as Benedick, although Mr. Fred Terry was the hero of the day, Mr. Tree may be frankly congratulated upon his selection of two such incomparable exponents as Mr. Lewis Waller (Brutus), and Mr. Franklin McLeay (Cassius). His own performance of Mark Antony had some merits, but the great oration demanded greater eloquence than Mr. Tree possesses.

Mrs. Craigie's ("John Oliver Hobbes") *début* as a playwright with "The Ambassador"—for her former little play can scarcely be called her own—was felicitous in every respect. Of

course there were defects of construction and of characterisation; there was exuberance, too, instead of terseness; but as a firstling it was admirable, admirably written by an author who knows and feels that the modern drama need not absolutely be divorced from literature. "The Ambassador" is, in my opinion, the play of the year, although Mr. Pinero's delightful "Trelawney of the Wells"—a wonderfully vivid picture of stage-land in the fifties—and Mr. Carton's brilliant attempt at creating a *real* modern "Comedy of Manners" in "Lord and Lady Algy" are in many respects superior. But it is only fair to place the highly promising initial effort of a novice above the work of experienced craftsmen, particularly when, as is the case in "The Ambassador," the literary workmanship is of a higher quality.

Over the other cardinal facts that rivetted my attention I can glide with swiftness, for the splendid outburst of public enthusiasm for Mr. Waller's acting in "The Musketeers" at Mr. Tree's own theatre, and the very recent resignation of Mr. Clement Scott, in some ways a great critic, are historical facts of a late date which everybody remembers. I would fain have welcomed Mr. Anthony Hope as a playwright. But despite the glorious record of the box-office, which is a thing entirely foreign to art, I cannot see much sterling merit in "The Adventure of Lady Ursula," which would be very amusing if Shakespeare had not written "As You Like It" some centuries earlier. Nor is "When a Man is in Love," by Anthony Hope and Edward Rose, a thing to be proud of. Mr. L. N. Parker, among the younger men, has again had plenty of chances in 1898—in fact there has been no man in the whole English-speaking world who has been such a favourite with the managers. But neither "The Happy Life" nor "The Termagant" nor "The Jest"—the latter two plays written in collaboration with Mr. Murray Carson, the actor—had any vital strength or staying power. And Mr. Parker's "Ragged Robin" is another instance of the fatality of our iniquitous system of adaptation. For Richepin's "Chemineau" was a beautiful poetic conceit, and "Ragged Robin," inefficiently acted into the bargain, was but a poor melodrama

of pretentious qualities. I regret to have to pronounce so severe a judgment upon the work of Mr. Parker, and I am given to understand that he resents my candour, but when a man is so much sought after, so favoured by Dame Fortune, that he has nearly become the universal-provider of our stage, he should bridle his fertility, and live up to his reputation and his undoubted gifts by devoting laborious care and earnestness to his work. Generally, 1898 has not been favourable to some of our (would-be) "young generation," for Mr. Esmond, too, has suffered defeat with his farce "Cupboard Love"; Mr. Laurence Irving produced in "Peter the Great" an ambitious, interesting, but, I regret to say, wholly immature piece, and Mr. Robert Hichens (in collaboration with Mr. H. D. Traill) clearly proved in "The Medicine Man" that, although he is a brilliant novelist, no less than Mr. Traill is a humourist of no mean attainments, the domain of the stage is an unknown land to him. The failure of the two last-named plays at the Lyceum is all the more deplorable since it must have materially contributed to a chequered and unprofitable season for Sir Henry Irving, to whom on this first day of a new year I beg to offer my most fervent and heartfelt wishes for rejuvenated health and a new lease of prosperity.

But to counterbalance a long list of failures, there are also some successes to be recorded of new-comers; above all, "The Elder Miss Blossom," by Ernest Hendrie and Metcalfe Wood, a play delicate in sentiment and humour, original in thought, and but slightly conventional in execution; a success withal, because it struck a tender chord in the human gamut, and because it was magnificently acted by our unique Mrs. Kendal. Then Mr. George B. Bancroft gave "Teresa" at the Garrick (first at the Metropole in Camberwell), and promises that he will succeed as soon as he is freed from the influence of the bad—I mean the latter-day bad—Sardou; Mr. Leo Trevor, in "Brother Officers," drew a most interesting picture of soldier-life, and should be cordially encouraged to develop this (in England) new vein of dramatic production. Captain Marshall scored much less than he deserved at the Court Theatre with his

charmingly farcical picture of colonial administration in "His Excellency the Governor," and made a praiseworthy incursion into the regions of the problem-play, when he wrote "The Broad Road." But as yet his grip is not firm enough, nor do I think his insight into human nature sufficiently profound to deal with the great seamy side of life; "The Broad Road" demonstrates this clearly. Mr. Stewart Ogilvie added "The White Knight" and "The Master" (for Mr. John Hare) to his repertoire. The former contained some good scenes, the latter was childish. Mr. Ogilvie is another author who has yet to justify the confidence of his managers. So far he has shown that he is a playwright born.

I have purposely left Mr. H. A. Jones' "Manceuvres of Jane" to the end of the list of original work. The result is that it baffles my critical faculties. On the first night it was presented as a comedy of manners—and it failed. Now, I hear, it is played as a farce, and it succeeds. What is it then? The author alone can answer that; but with all the deep respect I harbour for Mr. Jones' talent and for his splendid record, I regret that I must adhere to my first judgment, in which I endeavoured to prove the inadequacy of this play. For I venture to say that good art must be *intransigent*—that a good play cannot bear trafficking with the nature of its conception.

There now remains little to be said; we have had the usual number of Boulevard successes at our smaller theatres; our usual autumnal melodrama by Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton at the National Theatre (ye gods!) of Drury Lane, and another at the Adelphi—"The Gipsy Earl," by the versatile Mr. George R. Sims. We have been deluged with musical comedy, from "The Runaway Girl" to "Milord Sir Smith" and company. All that is a blank in the year's record.

Therefore, in order to wind up with a cheerful note, I have reserved some of the best achievements to the last. I refer to Annie Russel's admirable performance of Sue (by Bret Harte and Edgar Pemberton); to Forbes Robertson's much criticised, yet eminently thoughtful Macbeth, and to "Pelleas and Melisande," produced by the same actor, which has more ef-

fectually than all newspaper controversy pilloried the detractors of "The Belgian Shakespeare."

Withal, the harvest of a whole year's work in a populous country like Great Britain is not a bountiful one. There are other and smaller countries where more has been done with less display and more effect. Yet, if we remember that the drama is but a step-child of the nation, that the love of it is neither bred in the bone nor encouraged by education, or by the powers that be, it behoves us, while working unceasingly and unselfishly for the advance of our art, to be thankful for small mercies.

PROFESSIONAL MATINEE AT THE ST. JAMES'.

Dec. 31. 1898.

It was a graceful act on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Kendal to convene their colleagues to a professional *matinée*, and the younger artists who were favoured with a ticket had every reason to be grateful for a delightful afternoon. For to them the acting of Mrs. Kendal must have been something more than a mere amusement; they could not fail to come away with their souls full of deep impressions, their minds full of useful little lessons in the art of acting; and I feel sure that there was no one in the house whose heart did not beat that afternoon with unwonted fervour. Mrs. Kendal is always an admirable actress. But Mrs. Kendal at her best, as she was when her own artistic sisters and brethren established a powerful current of magnetism between the stage and the auditorium, is the most remarkable woman that adorns our stage. There may be some whose feeling runs deeper, some whose magic of fascination is more overwhelming, some who have a richer, mellower voice, and, perhaps, a more natural manner in leaving more to inspiration and relying less on minute study—but not one, I venture to say, is her superior in charm, in versatility, in unspeakable comeliness. I would go further than that. In the art of high comedy (French: *Comédie de mœurs*) Mrs. Kendal has no peer on our stage; she is the very ideal of the (theatrical) woman of forty. And withal her presence is so genial, so serene, her manner so womanly, her feeling so tender, that she commands our smiles as well as our tears with equal mastery. And we did weep when she enacted that beautiful scene of the second act—a scene which one would fain render famous as “the scene of renunciation.” At first the house was all glee and laughter; then, when gradually the disenchantment of the Elder

Miss Blossom drew towards a climax, sighs began to be heard, the sighs became sobs, the fountains would not be stopped, and the men cried as much as the women.

It was a beautiful outburst of emotion, because it was genuine ; and, coming from a community which is apt to be hypercritical and none too tender towards rivals, it was the greatest compliment that the profession could pay to their exalted sister. There is no need to repeat what has been said before about Mrs. Kendal's magnificent acting ; I would only remark that it has lost none of its freshness, vigour, and tenderness—on the contrary, if there was room for improvement (and I believe there was scarcely any from the first) Mrs. Kendal has not neglected to fulfil it. Every scene was a little comedy or a drama in itself, every movement a picture in miniature. So long as such performances are to be seen on the London stage, we need not absolutely despair. Alas ! why are they so rare ? (Answer : Because people do not work and study like a Mrs. Kendal.)

As for the play, it bears renewed acquaintance well. It may be incomplete in its conception, it may betray some of the tricks of the learned stage-hand, it may court criticism, because the man who wooed the Misses Blossom did not behave as a gentleman after a jilt of so serious a nature. But, for all that, it is a promising, in parts a fine, piece of work, that deserves to outlive the all too brief career of an unavoidably interrupted London season.

SUDERMANN IN ENGLISH

None too soon—about five years after his dramatic *début* in Germany and in every other country of Europe—Sudermann has found his way to the English stage. It is obvious why, of the five plays of this author, *Magda* (*Heimath*) should have been chosen, for *Die Ehre* fell into the sacrilegious hands of Augustin Daly, who had it adapted and thereby ruined. *Sodom's Ende*, at one time lent by Sudermann to the Independent Theatre, but abandoned, as its production overtaxed the resources of that little body, became Mr. George Alexander's property and may yet see the light, although the third act is altogether too "strong" to please Mrs. Grundy. *Die Schmetterlingsschlacht* (*The Battle of the Butterflies*) was a rank failure in Berlin, and has therefore escaped the notice of English managers and agents, and "*Das Glueck im Winkel*," which, with Mr. Hardy's permission, I would re-christen "*Far from the Madding Crowd*," has not yet rooted so firmly in Germany as to warrant transplantation.

But *Magda*, Sudermann's third and happiest financial, if not artistic effort, at once took Germany by storm, and from Germany it travelled to Paris, Rome, Vienna, Amsterdam and Stockholm with winged rapidity.

For *Magda* is one of those plays which attracts every emotional actress; it has this in common with *La Dame aux Camélias* and *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, that it contains one paramount character which appeals to every playgoer all the globe over, because it is not peculiar to one nation, but absolutely cosmopolitan.

Magda, the successful prima donna, who left her home, waded through misery and shame, and reached the pinnacle of fame, goaded by the spur of love for her fatherless, hungry baby—Magda, such as Sudermann paints her, is not a distinct type

of human nature. She is the heroine of a romance infused with stage-life. She behaves, she acts, she talks as people do in books—in novels of all civilised sections—but she does not convince us of her sincerity. She has, above all, nothing in common with the narrow little circle in the German provincial town whence she came. When I compare the language put into the mouths of the old lieutenant-colonel, of the pastor and of von Keller, with the rhetorical phrases in which Magda constantly moulds her somewhat common-place and would-be theatrical ideas, I cannot help thinking that Magda is a *poseuse*, and that her author has made her so not because he could not create her otherwise, but because this was to be “a piece for export,” a play which would suit any star from Bernhardt to Duse, from Wolters to Patrick Campbell.

In this respect Sudermann was right; Magda has proved a bait to all the stars of Europe; nay more, it will traverse scores of years by the side of the aforementioned plays of Dumas *fils* and Legouvé (and Scribe), but while it lives it will not enhance the reputation of the master-pen that wrote *Die Ehre*.

I must not mince matters. If *Magda* had been a stripling of the nascent drama of this country, I should have hailed its advent with delight, for, where the revival of dramatic literature is of such recent date, it behoves the critic to be lenient rather than severe; but German art, which possesses a powerful army of dramatists, headed by such as Hauptmann, Max Halbe, Hartleben, Rosmer—authors of whom people know next to nothing here, for our theatres generally serve us only German rubbish—lays no claim to indulgence, and in criticising one of its foremost writers, one should apply the highest standard.

In my estimation, it is the heroine who spoils the play, and in justice to Sudermann it must be said that it is not his fault, if from the first all foreign, *i.e.*, non-German, eyes are concentrated on her. He did not name the play after her; he called it *Heimath*, an untranslatable German idiom, which is but faintly interpreted by our “Home.” In this frame, the family of a retired officer in a small town, Sudermann has essayed to represent the narrowness of the German bourgeois, contrasted

with the loftier views of the exalted Bohemia to which Magda belongs. The old lieutenant-colonel is the incarnation of the almighty paternal power, which still survives abroad; the pastor is the typical clergyman, a cross between the Samaritan and the Apostle Paul; Keller, Magda's seducer, a Don Juan in his earlier days, has become a whited sepulchre. We are familiar with this personage even in England. Franziska the *Alte Jungfer* (old maid), Marie, the *Backfish* (sweet eighteen), they are both taken from life, and the whole family together is a perfect picture of teutonic Philistinism. I gather from the press-notice that the doings and sayings of the folk in the Colonel's old-fashioned drawing-room failed to interest,—aye, bored the critics. I can quite understand it.

One must have lived in the midst of these surroundings, one must know the ins and outs of the German character to appreciate the little traits, the minute details of Sudermann's canvas; otherwise it has no charm, no more than *Caste* or *Two Roses*, or *Our Boys* would have for a foreigner. And it is curious to note that outside Germany and Austria the play has been censured everywhere, not because the character of Magda is unreal, but on account of the seeming dulness and commonplace of her surroundings, which—if rightly understood—form the one great merit of the drama.

It is agreed on all hands that the production of *Magda* at the Lyceum was a failure, and if I am to be quite candid, I believe that the reason of its somewhat savage condemnation is that the play came at the wrong moment, and that it was "made in Germany, where the telegrams come from." It is no use denying it—it is quite a natural event. The political relations between nations stamp their influence on criticism. When France and Russia became bosom friends, every Russian goose became a swan in Paris; when France and Italy quarrelled over frontier questions, and *Cavalleria* made its appearance in the very moment when the Gallic cock crowed in fury, Mascagni's work was not criticised, it was butchered, hacked to pieces. If *Magda* had come last year—who knows?—but at present we do not love the German.

Yet the failure of *Magda* is a thing to be deplored, because it was unmerited. The translator, Mr. Louis Napoleon Parker, whom I cannot quite forgive for his malversation of the delightful *Talisman* (*Once Upon a Time*), has admirably performed a most difficult task—so well, indeed, that one condones a somewhat superabundant use of slang and Magda's vulgar (and ill-translated) expression, "I am on the loose." The play is mounted with accuracy and with a thorough knowledge of German interiors. And the acting is far, far better and more characteristic than I ever dared to expect after the notices in our leading papers. But, then, first nights are notoriously misleading, and I had the privilege of seeing the play when the wheelwork acted to perfection.

Two minor parts were in wrong hands. Miss Alice Mansfield made an *opéra-bouffe* old maid of the sour and sarcastic spinster, Aunt Franziska, and Miss Sarah Brooke, for all that she did her best, was not able to do justice to the sweet and winning character of little Marie. Mr. Scott Buist would have been excellent if his conception of Keller had been right. But it was wrong from first to last. Keller, sanctimonious humbug though he may be, is by no means comic. He is a cold, correct, dignified personage—such as reformed rakes mostly appear to be—who betrays his duplicity by his words, not by his acts. But Mr. Scott Buist made a wavering, ridiculous sort of charlatan of it, an inadmissible reading.

I liked the pastor of Mr. Forbes Robertson; his face, his manner, his speech were all in perfect harmony; the part is thankless, but the actor worked it up to impressive prominence. The Colonel of Mr. James Fernandez was nothing short of a masterly impersonation. I have seen many great Germans playing the part, but Fernandez holds his own. Through him the drama almost rose to tragedy—at least his acting was tragic: that uncertain gait, that quivering hand, that imperious air struggling with an enfeebled body and a breaking will, foreshadowed the catastrophe, and when it came it was unspeakably moving.

As *Magda*, Mrs. Patrick Campbell had excellent moments. The

great scene with Keller was full of fire, and Magda conveyed to her audience most forcibly how deeply she hated and despised the coward who betrayed her and abandoned her to the world's misery when his passion was gratified. Again, Mrs. Campbell was powerful in the last scene with her father, but on the whole her performance was somewhat monotonous. It may be that the feeling is entirely personal, but to me, Mrs. Campbell's voice is unsympathetic. She can storm, she can rage and imprecate and exhibit all the languor of the modern *névrose*, but she ever fails to convey sweetness and light, tenderness and warmth. This Magda was indeed the *star* in its accepted form, flitting from place to place, overworked, overstrung, now feline in her amenities, then capricious and satirical and quarrelsome, but never—not even in the scenes she played best—the refined, tenderhearted German Magda, the “great baby” spoilt and pampered, proud, vain and impulsive, yet *au fond* the ideal woman, the woman made to love and to be loved. This absence of the great feminine charm seems to me to be the overwhelming fault of Mrs. Campbell. She possesses a fine personality, power, and a rare capacity to fascinate in certain parts, but her talent seems undisciplined, steeped in modernity—the soulless modernity which we receive second-hand from France through *The Yellow Book*—and entirely devoid of that emotion which makes the heart beat faster.

When these lines appear in print the English *Magda* will be no more; it seems to be my fate to break a lance for plays which the crowd is taught to neglect, but a short life is no evidence of failure. And if *Magda* has failed to attract, it may yet serve our dramatists as a model of how to build an interesting play of the simplest materials.

IRVING AS RICHARD III

It is many years since I enjoyed an English theatrical performance so thoroughly as that of *Richard III.* at the Lyceum. It was a performance that showed, as I have constantly proclaimed, that the art of acting does indeed run high in England when those who take the lead in it rid themselves of the fatal idea that a theatre is a cheap bazaar to which the public flocks in search of gaudy wares, indifferent as to their quality. It was a performance that charmed the eye, that stimulated the intelligence, that sometimes made the heart beat quicker; a performance that lingers in the memory, as though one would retain it through life, and look forward to saying to a younger generation, "And in my time, when there were still actors who understood the great art of tragedy, Henry Irving played Richard III. as none of my contemporaries played it before him, as none have played it since. It was a masterly presentment, and Irving was a great actor....."

I have been an enthusiastic theatre-goer for not more than twenty years; but in those few years a whole array of Glosters has passed before my eyes. The older among them are long since dead; of the younger, Possart, Bouwmeester, and Richard Mansfield remain vivid in my memory. The first of these was cunning and sly, and velvety of tongue, but painfully afflicted with mannerism. Bouwmeester, the Dutchman, was powerful to the pitch of rudeness, now intensely dramatic, then again exaggerated and devoid of all princely distinction; his was an important creation in both the aspects of light and shade. Mansfield was a diplomatist from top to toe, revelling in new readings and valiant gestures; an elegant Richard who had taken lessons from Goethe's Mephisto. With these conceptions Irving's has nothing in common. There is no nonsense about

his Richard ; nature has created him hump-backed and halting, and in consequence he is not a man born to make love ; he is destined from the cradle to play the villain. But do not mistake my meaning ; he is no false traitor of the antiquated melodramatic kind, no bloodthirsty murderer, no cringing, evil-eyed monster, but a gentleman-villain, a man of excellent manner, with smiling lips, an open, steadfast eye, which flashes with wickedness only by stealth. Moreover, Irving's Richard never bewails his deformity ; he laughs at it, philosophizes, and in his monologues he convinces the audience that he takes up wickedness as a profession—for such is his good pleasure.

Nor does he ever lose sight of this point of view. He woos the Lady Anne by the dead king's bier as though he meant it ; he is charming, *avenant*, he flatters and cajoles ; he masters her gradually, and smiles upon her curses as though they were so many compliments. Not until he has won his game with the simple woman does he permit his features to be transfigured with an expression of triumph and malevolent self-conceit.

When the Lord Mayor offers Richard the crown, and he plays the god-fearing prince, not a sign betrays his hypocrisy until the moment when the mayor and sheriffs kneel before him—the King—when he buries his face in his prayer-book and peers mockingly over it, as though to say, "I have attained my object—*poor fools!*"

And thus he continues his deceit towards the Queen Mother, towards Buckingham, and the other nobles of the Realm, always courteous, well-meaning, genial ; one could not imagine him capable of injustice ; one sees in him but the courtier, and not for a moment the soldier.

But it is just here that the most notable part of this masterly creation lies concealed. So soon as Richard realizes that his crown is in danger, so soon as the war-trumpets sound, his character alters as though by magic. The courtier becomes a man of war. The panther changes to the king of beasts. The voice that but now was gentle and persuasive, rings out like metal. He commands, he shows a face of steel, though mortal terror gnaws his entrails, though his last night is tortured by horrid

visions; as he girds the sword about his waist he bears himself like a hero who fears nothing upon earth, determined to conquer or die. And his single-handed fight with Richmond is hardly play-acting: Irving slashes and hacks and wields his sword as though he were in reality defending his life. When in the end Richard is pierced with the steel, and it is up with his kingdom and up with his life, he does not crawl along the stage in a ghastly death-scene; no, he makes but a single gesture and, passionately tearing his gauntlet from his stiffening fingers, he flings it defiantly at the conqueror's feet, valiant unto death.

It does not seem necessary, after this illustration, to expatiate at greater length; and I am not inclined to go hunting after trifling points in Irving's acting which will not bear the light of criticism. My object has been to convey an impression of Irving's conception of this great part; and when I add that he spoke the lines irreproachably, that he enunciated the words more clearly than one is used to hearing from his lips, that he did not too greatly accentuate the crippled leg and shrivelled arm, that, as King Richard, he was, indeed, every inch a king, I have said all there is to say. I only feel that I cannot too often repeat how deep an impression the performance made upon me.

While singing Sir Henry's praises, I must not forget his fellow-actors. These seemed all to be as inspired with enthusiasm as were the troops of Napoleon before the Pyramids. The puissant art of the leader struck sparks, as it were, from all his followers; and Miss Geneviève Ward as the Queen Mother, a powerfully impressive figure, Miss Julia Arthur, with her tragic face and her thrilling, musical voice, as the Lady Anne, Mr. Cooper Cliffe as Clarence, and Miss Ashwell and Miss Norman as the two little princes, captivating models of innocence and youth—all played with a harmony and an assiduity very rarely to be met with upon the English stage.

J. T. Green
Dramatic Criticism
London 1899

THE NEW HAMLET

I do not fear to be contradicted when I say that the greatest Hamlet of modern times should not be sought for in the land of Shakespeare. When one thinks of Booth, Barnay, Possart, Rossi, Mounet-Sully, Bouwmeester—and how many others besides!—England cuts but a sorry figure with Irving, Beerbohm Tree and Wilson Barrett. None of the Englishmen can be placed by the side of Booth, or even of Possart. Irving was interesting, as he always is, but too old and too angular; Tree was almost all head and no heart; Barrett, the idol of the gallery, was a melodramatic, *coulissen-reissend*, picture-book Hamlet. All three count for little; and the English stage is still waiting for the Hamlet that shall be worthy to be called great.

Mr. Forbes Robertson is the latest to attack the part, and his courage has no need to be ashamed. He too is not the Hamlet of our dreams—the intensely tragic figure that fills our souls with pity as does the Christ crucified of Murillo. No tear springs to the eye for this Hamlet; the women do not sob as they did when Booth flourished at his best. But we enjoy, admire, feel that we would like to see this creation over and over again; for it is wholly original, and we say to ourselves: “I did not know that there was so much humour in Hamlet.”

Physically, Mr. Forbes Robertson is well-nigh one's ideal for the part. The clear-cut, regular features, with the thinker's crease about the mouth, and the finely-shaped nose, the bounteous brown hair, concealed beneath no wig, the elegant, willowy form, the grace of manners, the courteous bearing, and, above all, the deep, pathetic voice—these are precious qualities and but rarely united in such perfect harmony.

And Mr. Robertson possesses more than these qualities. He has always been one of the few English actors who have sharpened their intelligence by constant study; he not only knows how to imagine a part: he penetrates the character through and through; he is not content to rest in the even road of tradition: he seeks and studies, forms a personal opinion, is, in short, a personality.

Moreover, Mr. Robertson has received from Nature a sense of humour, and this has aided him in forming a conception of the character of Hamlet that is absolutely new and, as it were, entirely recreates it. True, this causes a certain loss to the tragic value of the play. The new Hamlet is in the essence of him a courtier, a man of the world, a well-spoken philosopher, a young intelligence undergoing its *Sturm und Drang* period, and no errant soul, no victim or sufferer; and yet I hardly dare complain that I was diverted rather than harrowed while witnessing this performance, so fresh, so young, so full of true humour.

The delicate lights and shades, the cordiality displayed towards Horatio, the diplomatic civility towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the gentle contempt for Polonius, the paternal tone towards Ophelia, the unconcealed hatred for the king, the sympathetic attitude towards the Queen—all were harmonized as in a fair mosaic; and through all this beamed the smile of the thinker who regarded the whole world as a pretty stage, and all its inhabitants as players.

In his monologues Mr. Robertson was less happy: he did not speak with sufficient freedom, did not hold enough converse with himself; he recited; but I am disposed to ascribe this to nervousness at a first night's performance, and to believe that the actor will grow more natural when he begins to feel more at home in his heavy part. On the other hand I doubt whether he will ever completely master Hamlet's tragic side; I consider him unsatisfactory in the scene with the players; he is too gentle, too plaintive in the closet scene; and when he dies, seated on the throne which he has conquered with his sword, that puissant soul escapes in a sigh, without a struggle, with an

expiring flash, like a breeze passing unnoticed through the sultry air. This death-scene was in the highest degree beautiful; it was a poetic ending, heightened by Horatio's tender parting, as he crowns the corpse with the diadem and decks its shoulders with the purple; but it was not dramatic. And the return of Fortinbras at the end with the warriors and flourishes of trumpets, instead of the words, "Good-night, sweet prince!" was an anti-climax justified neither by a pretended respect for Shakespeare (for the text is none too gently treated in this performance) nor by the theatrical pageantry of which it was the occasion.

For that matter there were worse defects in the performance. I will not dwell on the fact that most of the actors wore antique clothes on modern skins. We are used to that in England, and must needs remain used to it so long as the actor receives no technical education and the art of speaking verse is neglected almost entirely. Nor will I too strongly condemn the management for spending endless trouble on the scenery and properties while contenting itself with a second-rate cast. This is indirectly the fault of the public, which is content to starve its brain so long as it may feast its eyes.

But it is with difficulty that I can restrain my indignation at the choice of the Ophelia. I do not hesitate to declare that, in my opinion, Mrs. Patrick Campbell's performance of the part was the manifestation of an artistic failure. I had long foreseen this. For a long time I was almost alone in my judgment that this lady had not deserved the renown which she gained with the trump-card of Pinero's *Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—a part which every actress of experience can play; a part which, in Holland, Mrs. Frenkel played ten times better than she. But the public was as though bewitched—Mrs. Campbell was their idol; Mrs. Campbell was the fashion, and the public had to be disenchanted.

It happened slowly but surely. She played Juliet and did not satisfy; she played Militza without a triumph; she played Magda and we remained uncharmed; she played (why?) the Rat-Wife in *Little Eyolf* and kicked Ibsen's phantasy into the

pit of melodrama ; she even ousted that brilliant actress, Miss Janet Achurch, and played Rita Allmers herself, and we who love Ibsen shed tears of grief, while even the public which adores Mrs Campbell passed the doors and entered not.

Now Mrs. Campbell has played Ophelia, and suddenly the dissonant voices cease ; harmony reigns and unanimity. Why ? Because fashion is mortal, as all things under the sun ; because the art of advertisement betrays itself when put to the test ; because the *neurose* diction of modern taste suffers shipwreck on the cliffs of Shakespeare's healthy realism. Yes, Ophelia is a pale, feeble character ; a maiden more obedient to her father than to her own nature ; but she is a woman of flesh and blood, she has a soul and a heart, she is no monster born of nineteenth-century nervous diseases, not a mystical gossip, not a horror designed by Aubrey Beardsley's wilfully unnatural, distorted pencil. Mrs. Campbell, either through want of intelligence or through misdirection, was a caricature of Ophelia ; a prettily dressed doll ; a squeaking, humming automaton, bereft of feeling and the sap of life. The failure was complete ; almost as great as Mr. Robertson's success.

Will Mrs. Campbell now at last understand that true art does not lie in the unwholesome admiration of the wandering minds (copied from Paris) who founded, carried on and destroyed the *Yellow Book*, but that it lies in this : in thinking for one's self, feeling for one's self, living for one's self ? I dare not answer for her ; but I do know this, that soulless art is dead, and that if Mrs. Campbell does not realize this, her short, quick fame will vanish like a shooting star.

THE GRAVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM.

When an English boy has exchanged the feminine petticoats for the masculine trousers, he picks up a stick and plays at soldiering. By the time he reaches the mature age of eighteen, and is on not too indifferent terms with Her Majesty's English, he grasps the pen and offers his services as a dramatic critic. Hence it is fair and joyful to be able to say that there is not the slightest fear of Great Britain being, in the nearest future, in need of would-be judges of the drama. For which relief we may thank our lucky stars and the free tickets of the box-office.

At the first glance one would fain attribute this early devotion to the holy cause of dramatic justice to unselfish motives; it would seem to be bred in the bone like seafaring, soldiering, or shopkeeping, and, therefore, a national gift.

But, looking closer into the matter, one soon discovers that there are motives behind this early blossoming love of art, a love which outleaps at one bound the limits of discretion, experience, and competence. For the theatre is to the young a place of wonderful fascination; there are the afore-said free tickets, the nodding terms with conspicuous actors; there are the dear little chorus girls and the dearer little actresses, with their sweet smiles, dulcet flattery, their tea-parties and—*ne plus ultra* of delight!—their little suppers, all of which are unattainable glories to a youngster who has no finger in the dramatic pie.

And so, equipped with a pen, no knowledge at all, a style which would shame a housemaid, an inexhaustible fund of cheek, and some ammunition of regulation expressions culled from the daily papers, he sets to work and judges art and its adepts. At first he works for the glory of being a first or second

nighter for small newspapers, which are glad to cram the insignificance of their columns with any stuff that comes along, provided that the ghost need not walk; later, when he has established what he would call his record in the lowest walks of journalism, he writes at intervals to editors of more important papers, answers advertisements in the *Daily News*, frequents certain clubs (not the "Playgoers"), where somebody is always posted up with regard to the changes of *personnel* at newspaper offices, and finally, by hook or by crook, becomes connected with an organ of some standing. In course of time he learns the rudiments of his craft, and is able to write rapidly, and what one calls smartly, which is often the synonym of "vulgarly," and, unless he turns after awhile to the more lucrative occupation of playwriting, he grows up to be a kind of authority.

Of course, there are many other and less contemptible ways of graduating into dramatic criticism. There is the paragraphist, who, by way of sheer hard work, is one day called upon to replace the retiring critic; there is the leader writer, who is unexpectedly requested to fill a gap, and remains at the post; there is the actor who has had enough of the footlights, and would now have a try at criticism; there is the all-round man, who can just as well deal with a play as with a big fire or a cock-fight; there is the lady-writer who knows a lot about frocks, and therefore feels competent to write about the drama; there is the young man about town who can chatter in a bright and airy way, and has a smattering of Figaro and Boulevard knowledge; there is the literary man who, without special inclination, is lured by ample reward to take the drama under his wings.

There are also a few specialists, men who from their earliest days have loved the theatre, and have devoted endless study to its literature and countless evenings to performances. But the latter are few—I can count them easily on my ten fingers—and some even of them, after a time, rendered callous by the shocking mediocrity which reigns supreme on our stage, lose their love and their enthusiasm for their work, and, having ceased to consider the theatre seriously, grind out their notice

in pot-boiling haste, and without any regard for the grave responsibilities that are laid upon their shoulders.

The result is that dramatic criticism in this country, with a very few laudable exceptions, is dry, stale, and unprofitable; is entirely devoid of intellectual force; is neither elevating nor educating, but simply dull. The best that can be said for it is that it is honest—at least, honest in the sense that there is no evidence of traffic in money or even baser coin; but even if its honesty were put under the lens of acute criticism, can it be said that it is unimpeachable?

Is it honest, I ask, to clink champagne glasses with the manager after a first night, and then to rush to the office to write a notice? Is it honest to deal leniently with the most despicable show of an actor-manager because he is popular, and, may be, a large advertiser? Is it honest to see two acts of a play, and then to pronounce judgment on the whole production?

Is it honest to extol every commonplace melodrama or musical comedy as good, wholesome art, as an artistic triumph, and heaven knows what, and to befoul with language of the gutter the work of a great writer who boldly deals with the problems of life? "Proofs," you will exclaim; "names," you will demand. I will give you the proofs, but I decline to give names. Read what is said by Mr. Stanley Jones, than whom no man is better acquainted with the inner life of our stage; turn over the files of your great newspapers and read, as I have done, the notices which are written time after time on the plays and the acting at the Lyceum, the Haymarket, Her Majesty's, the Criterion; read the ceaseless admiration, the fulsome flattery, and compare it with what has been said by these self-same men, when efforts have been made to raise our stage from its unfathomable slough of despond, by bringing to the fore the works of great foreign masters, and of such men as Henley and Stevenson, whom all the world has acclaimed as the torchbearers of a new era.

No, I am not pleading my cause, ventilating my long-pent-up grievances, exacting eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Jeered at, besmirched, and libelled as I have been by every anonymous coward, when with a few others I offered my best, my all, nei-

ther for hire nor gain, but to wed the modern English stage to literature, and to enfranchise it from boulevard offal and home-made inanities—I have never vowed vengeance. Nemesis has done her work unaided by me.

Never, in the whole history of literature, has the press of a country cut such a sorry figure as when Ibsen and Maeterlinck dawned upon England; never have ignorance and stupidity made dramatic criticism such a laughing-stock for the universe; never was such bankruptcy of intelligence, such testimony of mental poverty.

These things are apt to be forgotten—that the Largest Circulator called “Ghosts,” on one page, an “open cesspool,” and on another, a “closed drain”; that a bouquet has been composed of all the insulting epithets hurled at the Norwegian master, which would make the hosts of Billingsgate jump with joy; that Maeterlinck, as modest a man as ever lived, was dubbed a *very* Belgian Shakespeare, and that his work, acclaimed in all the civilised countries on both sides of the ocean, was described as nonsense; that the men and women who followed the new movement were treated as morbid creatures; the women flat-chested, flat-footed; the men cranks, faddists, maniacs, and what not. But, mark my words, history does not forget; and while Archer’s name is respected in Paris, in Berlin, in Vienna, as a critic worthy to be named in the same breath with Lessing or Lemaitre, the revilers are totally unknown, and if their names be pronounced in literary circles abroad, and in England, they evoke nothing save a smile of pity or a movement of disgust.

It is painful to have to say this, for most of the men who have thus disgraced their art and their very country—to say nothing of their calling—are alive, and are still guides of public opinion. But to give proofs, to demonstrate how wantonly the majority of our critics abuse their power and their grave responsibilities, the sore chapter had to be revived.

For what does it show above all? That the majority of our critics are unfit to hold the scales. That in their little bourgeois souls there is no comprehension of the great battles that move

human life ; that their horizon is narrowed to the enjoyment of the pleasant, albeit lewd, to the horrible, provided it ends with an ill-fitting crown upon virtue.

Things with no meaning, or with two—to quote Pinero in “The Cabinet Minister”—disgust them not ; they tolerate the abuse of God’s name in the most vulgar melodrama ; they do not protest with the strongest language that human pen can command against the outrages in “The Conquerors”—outrages against women, outrages against a friendly nation ; they placidly allow heroines in Adelphi melodrama to proclaim their shame on the very street stones ; they have a benign and approving smile for doubtful jokes and risky situations. But woe betide us when an Ibsen writes a play that is more beneficial to our young men than a sermon, or a play that strikes at the very root of the relations between man and woman. Then these honourable men pour out their wrath upon everybody concerned with the production, and defend that virtuous England of ours where the moral ostrich reigns supreme.

And that is not all.

It is not only want of breadth and tolerance which debases our dramatic criticism ; it is insularity, stupidity, and levity.

What is going on in the lesser theatres of Paris is well-known to our critics ; a few of them even follow the Gymnase, the Comédie, and the Odéon. I will even admit that some read the French dramatic literature of the day. But what have they done to hand on to our public the treasure-trove that, with their encouragement, could become her own ? Sardou, and the clever triflers in impropriety, Bisson, Valabregue, and Feydeau, are their men ; but who, except those I said I could count on the fingers of my hands, has said a word in favour of inducing our managers to play Brieux, Lavedan, de Curel, Janvier—no matter the names—the whole brilliant school, in fine, that has shed its lustre on the world since Antoine opened the Théâtre Libre ? On the other hand, they have sounded no note of indignation against the countless assaults on Dumas Père and Fils, Augier, Feuillet, Richepin, massacred by the adapters,

who allow their inglorious names to be printed in fat letters and graciously allow their great victims the meed of *minuscules*.

What evidence have the majority of our critics given that the writings of young Germany, of Austria, of Scandinavia, of Italy and Russia, are anything but a closed book to them? Has not Sudermann been condemned on his meanest play? Has not Bjornstjerne (see *Telegraph* notice of the "Gauntlet") been called a failure in every sense? Has not one of our writers been allowed to ruin the most charming poetic fancy of our time, "Der Talisman," without protest?

Verily, it is a proud record.

And how is the work done?

How many, I ask, sit down with their head on their hands for hours to ponder, to attempt to do justice to work which may have cost months of toil?

How are the notices written? I could point to men who write about each act, bit by bit, after the curtain falls; others who jot a few hasty lines on their knees; others who steal any epigram made by a colleague in the corridors, and convert it to their own use; others who rush to their office and in an hour pour out a hasty column of verbiage, of exaggeration, with not a single substantial thought. Others, again, work after the price-list system; they take half-a-dozen actors together, and label them excellent, good, bad, or indifferent. And that they call criticism; that they call doing their duty as critics.

Let no one come and tell me that the system is more at fault than the men, that the public must be informed, that the Press hungers for quick copy, or I shall answer: Curse the system and—alter it. Do what Archer, Lemaitre, and Sarcey do; what Speidel does in Vienna, what Frenzel, Brahm, Mauthner, and all the intellectual forces of Berlin do; forego hasty judgment and think before you write. Send a reporter to the first night and let him tell, if need be, the plot, with a single line of comment upon the reception of the play; and set one day a week aside for an article in which the critic, instead of spouting journalistic commonplace, sits in judgment and teaches. For criticism does not mean simply to praise or blame;

it means to sum up, to show where the faults lie and how they can be remedied, and to extol good work, with ample evidence for such praise.

That is the mission of dramatic criticism, and whoever is too indolent or too ignorant to work upon these principles, is unworthy of the office he holds.

It comes, then, to this, that in this country, which has at intervals produced its Lewis, its Hazlitts, its Archers, its Shaws, and a few others—alas, why did Shaw cease to teach us what criticism should be?—most writers of dramatic criticism are quite unconscious of the grave responsibilities which their task lays upon them.

They forget—many wilfully—that the drama is not a play-thing, but an institution which should be the pride and the mirror of the nation.

They forget that, to stimulate the good, one must be severe and without fear or favour; that they should neither crush the small nor worship the fetish of the mighty; they forget that a critic, to do his work well, should not be biassed by the exigencies of the advertisement column, nor be “chauvinist” when the young generation, even though it be foreign, knocks at the door.

They forget that in judging lightly, hastily, unlovingly, they trifle with the careers, the ambitions, the hopes of toilers, whose work, when it is honest, is worthy of all consideration and reverence.

They forget, lastly, that while impartiality should be extended to all, the lesser lights, when they err, should be leniently dealt with, while the strong and the prominent, by virtue of their very position, should be castigated when, in the hunt after money, they commit violence upon the sacred cause of art.

What, then, is it that I plead for?

Where would I seek my ideal?

I will tell you; and before doing so I desire to say that I do not expect every ordinary writer to be a Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose “Hamburg Dramaturgy” will be the school for criticism for all times; nor can we all possess the infinite fund of wit of a Lamb, a Leigh Hunt, a Jules Janin, the enormous

narrative powers of a Sarcey, the scientific depth of a Faguet, the grace, the refinement or style of a Jules Lemaitre.

But that which has been given to all of us—the very foundation of our critical creed—is the faculty for study.

We have no right to sit aloft in our critical cathedral and fancy ourselves little Jupiters and Solomons rolled into one, no more than the actor who plays in a "long run" does his duty when he wastes his days in idle talk and futile recreations. Intellectual laziness is the fault of our players as well as of their judges. We should work and, in the immensity of the task before us, recognise the smallness of our knowledge.

It is all very well to say, as a well-known critic once did to me when I spoke to him of Schiller, "I do not read German, and don't want to read Schiller." For Schiller's "Brigands", and all the maturer work that followed, are utterances of a powerful mind, which no judge of dramatic literature can afford to disregard.

No. To attain competency in criticism it is not sufficient to have recollections of Shakespeare, to be able to quote, or to be familiar with "The School for Scandal" and the more modern plays from Tom Robertson onward, for they are but the fruits of genius and talent of one single country; and the horizon of one who is called upon to establish what is good or bad, with due regard to the progress of the human mind, should not be bounded by the English Channel.

In fine, to be content with what is moving in the English dramatic world, or to feed on the few translations of foreign works, often none too well selected nor accurately performed, is writing oneself down a narrow person of superficial knowledge.

I contend that a dramatic critic should strive to be a linguist, to know what one calls abroad the modern tongues, English, French, and German. You will object that the French are more insular than ourselves, that not everyone has time to study languages. And I will answer: The excuse is plausible but inadmissible as to the first part, and, as to the second, it is paltry.

True, the French do not study languages, but the dramatic Garden of France is so well stocked that it needs no replenish-

ing. Does not every naughty boy of an adapter steal the apples from the Gallic tree and work them into the pie of his native land? No; the French, although they would be all the better for it, need not learn languages; they are born with the gift of literary appreciation, as they are born actors. But the critics of all other nations must study languages; and you can take it as a fact that the best men all over Europe do so.

As for want of time, the excuse is pitiful; where there's a will there's a way; has not Archer learned the Scandinavian tongues in ripe manhood? And do we not owe it to him that, at least, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Brandes, are something more than mere names to us? And there are others who, like Archer, find between the day's toil and the evening's labour time to plough in the field of fresh languages. But, then, to do that one must be filled with love for one's task, and *not* consider it an irksome duty.

The last words have led me to strike the right note.

To many the duties of dramatic criticism are irksome; they go to the theatre because they are paid for it. They do not love their work. No enthusiasm swells their breast. They know well enough that the majority of new productions are not worth the money wasted, nor the ink spilled, on them. And their work bears the traces of this mental state. Moreover, they have been accustomed to certain hard and fast rules. The actor-manager and his lady are always to be treated with a certain deference, for his name is a trade-mark, he has large risks at stake and is a patroniser of the advertisement column. The second-rate manager is to be treated with condescension, occasionally with severity. The innovator, habitually called revolutionist or faddist, is to be treated with all the scorn becoming to an authoritative critic. And the Drury Lane shows are always record triumphs, as those at the Gaiety are ever a new artistic success for the manager; while the Adelphi melodramas are invariably evidence of the wholesome taste of the British public.

Now all this, I submit, is wrong from beginning to end.

Above all, the critic should feel conscious that the office

he holds is one of great and grave importance; that he should approach his work with paternal affection—the love that understands how to praise and how to chastise; that, whatever the circulation of his paper may be, he deals with the life-work and the career of those he judges. Therefore he should be a man without fear, favour, or prejudice, and divest his mind as far as possible from all human pettiness. In his eyes all should be alike, the mighty actor-manager, the starring lady, the society actress, the struggler of modest attainments, or the beginner, who can learn much from good criticism. One element alone he should fight, and that is the impure. Persons of irregular life, women brought upon the stage by notoriety or colonial gold, should not hold a passport to praise and glory. Merit alone should be the standard; and if at a play-house the actor should outshine his manager, no ointment of blatant flattery should be smeared on the latter's lacerated feelings, but Cæsar should be given Cæsar's due. Yet since we are human and apt to stray, when we are dealing with humble workers who fail to reach the mark, and in consideration for their struggle for life, let us stray in the path of indulgence.

And this brings me to the conclusion of my plea, to that confession of faith which I cannot withhold, if this address is to go forth to sow good seed and to sound the note of conciliation after its rugged candour. Let me say to you that I hold the office of dramatic critic as sacred as the exalted functions of Her Majesty's judges; that when such a one goes to the theatre, he should be free from all outside influences, be they friendship, prejudice, or animosity; and when, after mature deliberation, with head and heart wholly devoted to the work, there comes the time for summing up, there should be but one desire—to do one's duty by what one believes to be the truth.

TOM ROBERTSON'S "SCHOOL" AT THE GLOBE.

Jan. 8. 1899.

If Mr. Hare had but postponed this revival for a week and a half, we should have celebrated the birthday of a "lady of thirty." For "School" first saw the footlights on January 16, 1869—more than a lifetime ago, as the vitality of plays goes. But "School" has weathered the storm well. A wrinkle here and there, perhaps, a crow's foot lurking among its features, may be detected by an observant eye, yet there is youth still and freshness, and oh! so much serenity and sweetness. We may well sneer at the plays of "cups and saucers"—as the next generation will probably sneer at our comedies of "damns, drink and divorce", but if we are not entirely blasé we must own that these pretty little stories, full of pretty sentiment and wholesome thoughts, exercise much charm, and, in parts, are no less pleasing than in the early seventies. Tom Robertson, the dear old fellow, who was as unaffected a playwright as ever lived, knew nothing of our latter-day dramatic acrobatics. He did not spin finely-woven epigrams and speeches of pretentious grandeur. At his worst he would coin a few puns—and horrible ones, too; at his best, when his pen was guided by his heart, he would jot down a simple expression of sentiment, artless in style no doubt, and not soaring high above the roofs and spires, yet it would strike home and engage our sympathy for his characters. There are plenty of such happy lines in "School," and one of them—when Bella says about Naomi: "For she is wealthy and I am not—....." and Beaufoy whispers aside: "How these great natures misunderstand themselves....."—is, in spite of a clumsy choice

of words, a gem of unsophisticated philosophy. It almost reveals with one stroke of the pen what sort of man the writer is, and what one may expect of him.

Now, of course, if "School"—if nearly all Robertson's work is judged from the realistic point of view, very little will survive the ordeal. He wove romance and vivified it with sundry touches of human nature; but life itself, with its depths and its heights, was too vast for the small compass of his talent. Therefore, one must approach these comedies in the right spirit; some are meant to reflect in an imaginative form the manners of their period, some, like "David Garrick," are wholly romantic, others are fairy-tales pure and simple. "School" belongs to the latter. It is a Cinderella up-to-date (of 1869), and if the well-known plot were to be recited, it should be started with the perennial "Once upon a time there was a poor orphan and a rich heiress; there also was a rich lord, and a valiant, though impecunious, soldier....." and so on. For all the indispensable elements of the fairy tale are included in the play, even the traditional villain, here Mr. Krux, whom we could well have spared, as he is the only discordant note in this tale of blameless innocence and spotless virtue.

At times we feel that the early youth of "School" has gone, and the end is almost ludicrous in its mechanism.

Dr. Sutcliffe says: "Many things are required for the composition of the real thing. One wants nobility of feeling," and all other characters chime in:

Farintosh: "A kind heart."

Dr. Sutcliffe: "A noble mind."

Farintosh: "Modesty."

Dr. Sutcliffe: "Gentleness."

Farintosh: "Courage."

Dr. Sutcliffe: "Truthfulness."

Farintosh: "Birth."

Dr. Sutcliffe: "Breeding."

Mrs. Sutcliffe: "And, above all, School."

But, on the other hand, how delightfully breezy are the

scenes of the school-girls, how cleverly that little minx of a Naomi, and that tender-hearted Bella, are drawn; how well it is all put together by a craftsman who holds the technique of the stage as it were in the hollow of his hand. It does one good to see what the masters of the day before yesterday did, how they could contrive fun without vulgarity or doubtful allusions, and draw "thumbnails" of the human heart without grandiloquence or analytical vivisections.

The old fairy tale which, by the way, had two fathers—the German, Roderich Benedix, and our own Robertson—lost little of its charm by the acting of Mr. John Hare's company, but curiously enough the ladies were far better than the men. Mr. Frank Gillmore, I regret to say—for he is a painstaking young actor—entirely misconceived the part of the optimistic Lord Beaufoy. He was as heavy as lead, and the love scene in the second act, which he played in a funereal voice, became almost intolerable. Nor did Mr. Gillmore master the longer speeches, thereby once more confirming a recent "pronunciamento" of Mr. W. S. Gilbert. In the last act Mr. Gillmore fortunately grew livelier, but on the whole his performance wants overhauling. Mr. Kerr was also scarcely an ideal Jack. His manners left much to be desired. It may be a tradition of '69 to talk with a full mouth, or to talk to a lady while holding a pipe between the lips, but if so we have made a little progress since then. Altogether Mr. Kerr was too uncanny in his attitude towards Naomi, and I cannot read that in the part, albeit that Jack had been in the wars. The old Dr. Sutcliffe of Mr. W. H. Day was very dignified and sincere—much better than Miss Fanny Coleman as his wife, whose high-pitched society intonations are so many discords in this kind of play. Mr. Hare junior was intensely (and rightly) sneakish in the ungrateful part of Krux. He deserved the special call with which he was honoured, while Mr. John Hare, the perfect artist that he is, endowed Beau Farintosh with exquisite touches of spontaneous humour, and in the last act his outburst of paternal feeling was touching in its sincerity.

Miss Mabel Terry Lewis, as Bella, was nervous, and showed

often enough that she is a novice. But the material for an actress of distinction is not wanting in her. Her presence is most agreeable, her voice has the pleasant ring of the older Terry generation, and her emotional powers, if not great as yet, are full of promise. The part of Bella is by no means easy, and it is a compliment to Miss Lewis to say that she nearly had it in her grasp.

I have left the Naomi of Miss May Harvey to the last because she deserves the most important place in the record of the evening. Fortunately for me, I am unhaunted by recollections; I have never seen Lady Bancroft in the part, and have forgotten all her successors. So Miss Harvey's performance was practically a new creation to me, and one which I found wholly delightful. When one reads a play—and I often read a little of Robertson to remain in touch with the drama of his time—the characters often seem to rise from the pages. And the Naomi of Miss Harvey, in her impulsiveness, her enthusiasm, her girlish caprices and dreams of wonderland, was entirely the character as I pictured it in my study.

Having said so much it is almost needless to add that the revival was greeted with unanimous approval. Yet in the midst of the vociferous applause there sounded a melancholy chord. It dinned the question into our ears: "How many plays of our modern 'School' will survive thirty years from now?"

THE AMBASSADOR

Jan. 15, 1899.

Ever since my Christmas journey to Paris I have vainly battled against an unspeakable feeling of depression. When, in less than forty-eight hours, I had seen "Resultat des Courses" at Antoine's, "Le Berceau" at the Comédie, both by Brioux, and, above all, "Georgette le Meunier," by Maurice Donnay, and, one may well say, by Rejane—when I had listened to the most finely-chiselled French the pen and the tongue can command, and seen the most exquisite acting of a Bartet, a Rejane, and an Antoine, it was clearer to me than ever; we are in playwriting at least a quarter of a century, and in acting, too, a long way behind the French.

This statement is not made for the purpose of extolling foreign art to the detriment of our own. Far from it; for I love the English theatre as dearly as anyone, and I have, when needed, been its warmest defender. But what I say is the unmistakable truth—is also a warning not to sit still and fan ourselves under the shady trees of our mediocrity, but to work desperately hard under the scorching sun of ambition, not heeding the sweat on our brow or the fatigue that may at times overwhelm our limbs. For we have much to learn, we writers, ease, and grace, and rhythm of language; and you actors the use of your limbs, of your tongues, of your voices, of your brains. If you do not believe me, go and see the first act of "Resultat des Courses" at Antoine's, and the two last of "Georgette le Meunier" at the Vaudeville. There you will see what playwriting and acting should be. And do not console yourselves with the idea that only the stars, only Rejane,

and only Antoine, are worth seeing, as is sometimes the case in French touring companies; no, at these two theatres, more even than at the Française, every actor is an artist, and the acting of every one is an integral part of the whole.

What has all this to do with the revival of "The Ambassador"?

In the first place it can never do any harm to place on record in a few lines what one has learned abroad. Everybody knows what Heinrich Heine has said on that subject, and I think we all agree. We cannot all write "Reisebilder," but we may all acquire "Bildung" by our travels. In the second place—which is really the foremost—when I saw the revival of "The Ambassador," I was, all the time, most forcibly reminded of my recent studies in Paris.

I do not contend for a moment that "The Ambassador" is badly acted. I will even concede that Miss Fay Davis has improved, is less namby-pamby, and that Mr. George Alexander is gradually rising to the dignity of the knightly red bandoleer that adorns his person. But I wish to point out that the play is incongruously acted, that the picture, however pretty and attractive, is not harmonious, that the artist who has superintended the process of vitalising the play has omitted to cement the parts firmly together. It is not easy to define this without hurting personal feeling, so I will in the main give no names at all, but merely indicate points.

The very first note struck was a false one. We read that Miss Gainsborough's sister was a nun. But where was there ever such a pretty, wordly creature who would have taken the veil without showing in her demeanour that there had been some great catastrophe in her life? I know something of the nunnery, as I have lived in Belgium close to "Bruges la Morte," but such society-nuns as Miss Alice Gainsborough I have never met. That there are some I do not doubt; but in this case the contrast, indicated by the authoress, demanded less vivacity and more demureness. Equally false were the manners of the various society ladies calling on Lady Beauvedere. It was Suburbia, not Mayfair; and they talked in rotation like a compound record of

the phonograph. In the second act, where the same ladies were grouped like Christy Minstrels, and exchanged female amenities with cruel zeal, this artificiality was even more jarring, but the scene is one of the mistakes for which the main responsibility rests with the authoress. It is not Oliver Hobbes at all; it is Oscar Wildeism in its most affected dramatic form.

The next caricatures in the picture were the Taylerson family of the third act—Mrs. Taylerson, the mother, and her three would-be minor operatic stars. This quartette hails from somewhere in the Great Republic, and should therefore, be excused its transatlantic accents. But such a horrible twang as was uttered by mother and girls, some of whom, I suspect, have never been across the water, and have fed their intonations on music-hall traditions, may be encountered in the backwoods of Florida, but in the drawing-room it could scarcely have ever been heard before. A moderate amount of accent, I take it, is not displeasing to English ears, but a superabundance of it is something akin to torture; and as Miss Davis herself and Miss Nillson are already sufficiently endowed with the graces of the American tongue, it would have been both merciful and in good taste to tone down the energies of the Taylersons.

With the excellence and the shortcomings of the interpreters of the main characters I have already dealt, when the play made its first appearance. Some have distinctly improved, notably Mr. Esmond, whose shame-faced and crestfallen exit in the last act is a thing to be remembered with joy and with compassion. We really shared the young man's grief at his discomfiture. Again, Miss Violet Vanbrough, as the interesting Dowager Lady Beauvedere, was truly sympathetic. There was something of the tragedy of the near forties and something of the joy of living in the ring of her voice, and the blend of both, allied with a most prepossessing appearance and toilet of taste, formed an *ensemble* of much charm. Miss Violet Vanbrough is happily herself again! But among the long list of characters the most fascinating of all was the Princess Vendramini of Miss Granville. To assert this may seem bold, for

the part is a small one, and its bearing upon the action secondary. Still, I adhere to it. Miss Granville deserves the palm for impersonating a most difficult character to perfection. I do not know whether she has copied the Princess Vendramini from life—whether she is familiar with the strange and floating population of Aix, of Vichy, of Nice, of Monaco, rastaquouères indeed, nearly all of them. If she has, bravo! for her powers of observation; if not, bravissimo! for her imagination. It was the one part acted with all the verve, the assurance, and the “elegance” (Americanism but picturesque) which one would fain see transplanted from the Paris Gymnase and Vaudeville to the West End of London.

As for the play itself, it is the only tonic at present in the feeble theatrical repertoire of London. It is the only dramatic work on our boards that evidences the possibility of bringing the English dialogue to nearly the same level as that of the French. Mrs. Craigie may yet have to learn a good deal from Lavedan and Donnay as regards the mould of her repartee and the directness of her epigrammatic sallies, and more from the sober constructive powers of Brieux, Hervieu, and the younger men who have established their doctrines and their fame; but she is on the right path. Her work has emerged from the common rut of our dramatic methods, and so far it stands alone in the polish of its language and the aristocracy of its atmosphere. Let there be no misunderstanding. I am not foolhardy enough to cry: Master-piece! a word which has become pretty cheap in our book-reviews now-a-days, and one which should be used with the greatest care. For I know full well that “The Ambassador” has its faults. Could it be otherwise in a firstling? But now, after having read the manuscript in print, after having seen the play again and again with unabated interest, my opinion is unaltered. And without venturing upon prophecies, for the gift of playwriting is as fickle as Dame Fortune herself, I feel justified in declaring that Mrs. Craigie has laid the basis for a closer union between the drama and literature.

M A T C H E S

Jan. 22. 1899.

"Aha!" I said when in the first act the whole bag of theatrical tricks had been emptied on the stage, "an actor's play!" And so it was; for although Mr. Bagot was proclaimed as joint author, Mr. Charles Glenny's name was given first by the god-father of this *matinée*, Mr. Maurice.

How did I know that "Matches" was constructed by an actor?

First, because it contained all the hocus-pocus of the histrionic lumber-room.

Secondly, because it was a mixture of all the gaities and sentimentalities that have amused and mollified the crowd ever since the tale of the beggar-girl who became a princess, was put into dramatic form.

Thirdly, because the construction was so skilful and adroit that there was absolutely no room left for a thorough characterisation of more than one person, viz., "Matches."

Fourthly, because it was of the stage—stagey, in spite of its obvious intention to be lifelike.

Fifthly, because there were some very clever "coups de théâtre" (end of the second act), which could only spring from the brain of one who has lived in the world between the wings.

Sixthly, because there was a great deal to please the gallery and very little to rouse the stalls.

Seventhly, because nearly every part—if it had been properly studied—contained a fine opportunity for bravour-acting.

And that is how actor's plays are manufactured.

I tell you all this, my dear readers, not because I want you

to study this particular "métier" and do likewise—heaven forbid!—but in order to escape from the commonplace formula without which criticism of this kind of play is well-nigh impossible. For "Matches" is only fit for slaughter or for praise, or—at a pinch—for a peg to hang a theory on. I do not want to break a butterfly, nor do I feel inclined to praise a mongrel as good stock, so I have chosen the opportunity to explain the ingredients of the drama produced under the influence of the footlights. It would be unfair to say that "Matches" is a tedious little play. Far from it. If it had been acted "comme il faut"; if Mrs. Leigh had known her part and her Irish; if Mr. Harry Nicholls had been less Drurylane and more Chevalieresque; if the surroundings of the first act had been realistically sordid instead of ideally "faked"; if—I could add an endless tail of ifs—then "Matches" would have passed muster. As it was, we enjoyed happy little sallies in the language of East End alleys. We laughed when Harry Nicholls despised claret as an unknown and unsavoury beverage; when Annie Hughes gave a piece of her mind to the haughty members of her guardian's family, and when she promised that her battered doll should be a "lady," and wound up her address with a sound piece of East End objurgation. But the padding between Matches' humility, rise, and greatness was but poor stuff, and the wicked Honorable—of Adelphian dramatic lineage—who got a sound thrashing when he forced his attentions upon the newly-discovered heiress—tried our patience beyond endurance. It was the worst species of theatrical fossil, and the actor, Mr. C. Troode, with whom we condoled, was worthy of a better part.

Miss Annie Hughes, who made her mark in coster-characters when she created the charming "Bit of Old Chelsea," finds in "Matches" some opportunities to display her great versatility, and had her partners in the first act been more on the alert, she would have been even more effective. As it was she was sufficiently common to amuse her hearers, yet she never became coarse, and in the second act her awakening, as it were, to the consciousness of Matches' shortcomings was truly pathetic. But

Miss Hughes has not yet entirely mastered the dialect and the manners of the East-enders. At times she cannot forget her own personality, which is the charming and refined Annie Hughes. Her lowliness, unlike Mr. Albert Chevalier's, who has entered into the very coster-skin, is skin-deep. If she intends to follow up this line of characterisation, full of great possibilities as it is, she should study life beyond Aldgate Pump, or else read the works of Morrison, St. John Adcock, and Pett-Ridge, all of whom are trustworthy authorities on East London. From these writers, too, she might get a play of mean streets worthy of her talents. For "Matches" is, after all, but amateur work, fit for the theatres of the outer circle, but altogether out of proportion to the talent and the labour spent upon a West-end matinée.

REVIVAL OF "THE DANCING GIRL"

Jan. 22. 1899.

Up to the third act the success of Mr. Jones' play had grown from curtain to curtain; up to the third act his latest effort surpassed all that the author of "Judah" had done before. But the fourth act was a heavy, and, let me say it at once, an absolutely unnecessary decline which nearly wrecked the vessel in full sight of the harbour. I for one, decline to acknowledge that "The Dancing Girl" is a play in four acts—it is a drama in three, with a needless excrescence in order to satisfy the crowd which is accustomed to be told what has become of all the leading characters.

If I were Mr. Jones I would make a bold stroke: I would not try to cut or to remould that fourth act, I would eradicate it with one vigorous stroke of the blue pencil, for nothing else will amend it. But let me not dwell on that. When the curtain fell upon the third act, when the gentle fingers of crippled Sybil Crake grasped the hand of the Duke of Guisebury, as he lifted the poisoned cup to his lips to end a life of dissipation, of uselessness, of frivolity, I felt that this beautiful scene, this trying moment, ended the play. What comes after is waste. For a new life has begun for the duke, and we care little for the lot of his mistress, the dancing girl, who has fled into the wide world, loaded with her father's curse. Had the play ended here, it would have been a realistic work of high merits. For everything was lifelike, simple, powerful. The scene of the Quaker Island, St. Endellion,

a lovely spot bordered by wild rocks and encircled by sea-waves, is drawn in a masterly manner; the contrast between the intolerant fanatics, the heretic girl—who strives hard to be devout in St. Endellion, and dances and feasts while in London—and the lighthearted duke, is most striking. Again, as the conflict grows, in the two following acts, when both the duke and his mistress, the dancing girl, gallop along the road to ruin, while at last the old Quaker, in quest of his daughter, penetrates into the mansion of the duke, who is entertaining his guest for the last time with wine, music, and dance, the situation becomes more and more enthralling until it culminates in the scene which I have briefly outlined above. The dialogue is throughout vigorous and natural. The comedy scenes, in which a *fin-de-siècle bon-vivant*, capitally acted by Mr. Kerr, plays the main part, are delightful in their caustic humour and brilliant lines, and the characters are humanly evolved. Each act was greeted with an outburst of applause; and however long they seemed, for much could have been left out without prejudice to the action, the interest of the public seemed unflagging. In the end the reception was very favourable, but it bore traces of bewilderment—everyone seemed to be impressed by the superfluity of the fourth act.

The acting was admirable as far as most of the actors were concerned. Mr. Tree's impersonation of the Duke is another great achievement for this versatile actor. He showed us the character in all its great frivolity, with its basis of human kindness. Miss Neilson made a great effort as the Dancing Girl; sometimes she was amateurish and over-emphatic, but in the great scene with her father (Act III.) she struck the right note. On the whole she succeeded best in the light scenes, in which she was the gay, pleasure-seeking dancing girl. Mr. Terry was passionate, vigorous and convincing as the young Quaker, who for a time prefers the world to the religious seclusion of St. Endellion, because he cannot free himself from the charm

of the dancing girl. The deep impression made by the final scene of the third act was mainly due to Miss Norreys. Nothing could have been sweeter or more heart-rending than her unaffected demeanour, when she determined to save the duke, and carried it out without a word, but with an infinitely expressive gesture. Mr. Fernandez played the old Quaker in an antiquated style, swallowing his words and aiming at striking "poses," yet the curse in the third act struck home, thanks to the author's hammerlike language. This curse is one of the most powerful denunciations of its kind; it even eclipses Mosenthal's "Deborah." In spite of its lamentable ending, "The Dancing Girl" is a play that will rank among the best productions of our modern stage.

Since I wrote the above notice, precisely eight years ago, on January 19, 1891, Mr. H. A. Jones has made the bold stroke, and when the play was reproduced at Her Majesty's for the benefit of the Gordon College, the fourth act had been boldly shorn away. Before that—in 1892—I had made the same experiment on the occasion of the first performance of "The Dancing Girl" at the Royal Theatre at Amsterdam, and, although there the play never obtained more than a *succes d'estime*, I am convinced that the curtailment was its salvation from disaster.

In the main my criticism of 1891 holds good to-day, wherefore I have ventured to quote it in full. The play is undoubtedly one of Mr. Jones's best, and if nowadays I should feel inclined to be a little more captious and to find fault with Society as presented by Mr. Jones in the third act, or with the somewhat antiquated methods of bringing the chief characters together on the stage, I gladly admit that I enjoyed the revival, while Sybil Crake's timely appearance at the end sent—now as before—a thrill of emotion through my veins.

The acting, too, was scarcely less satisfactory than on the play's birthday. Poor Rose Norreys has, alas! vanished, and the memory of her broken career was the one sad

note in a joyful afternoon. But Miss Eva Moore is the best successor that could have been imagined. She also is petite and full of tenderness, and endowed with a caressing voice. She acts in a delightfully simple manner, is natural to a fault, and apparently throws all her heart into Sybil's work of reclamation. It was a beautiful performance from start to finish, and if the curtain rose finally half a dozen times, Miss Moore deserved a fair share in this distinction.

Mr. Tree's Guisebury remained what it was, an achievement of great merits. If he could only be persuaded to stick to the frock coat and leave costumes alone! In characters of men of the world—men of wit and men of manners—Mr. Tree is at his best. Evening dress is his war paint, the salon his battlefield, the eloquence of the *raisonneur* is his sword, and the brilliancy of his swift caustic diction his victory. In fine, Mr. Tree was born to impersonate modern characters, and in these he has made and will make his lasting records.

I regret that I cannot alter my opinion of Mr. Fernandez's old Ives. It was a painstaking but old-fashioned performance. Nor has Miss Julia Neilson improved her impersonation; I even fear that it has deteriorated, for Miss Neilson has, perhaps unwittingly, adopted the languid intonations and the longitudinal—yes, that is the word!—movements of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. And that actress is, in my opinion, the most undesirable model to copy, apart from the question whether an artist of Miss Neilson's rank is justified in imitating anybody. At any rate, there is no harm in calling her attention to the matter before her artistic individuality has wholly lost its distinction. Mr. Fred Terry remained as manly and forcible as before in the thankless part of John Christison, and Miss Hilda Hanbury was sweet and unaffected as the dancing girl's innocent little sister.

The revival, which was greeted with unfeigned approval, is not to be ephemeral. Mr. Tree intends to try the vitality of the play when his present programme has run its course. It will be interesting to observe how the renewed acquaintance will strike the public. But I beseech Mr. Jones not to

carry out his intention of essaying the construction of a new fourth act. It would be wantonly jeopardising the chances of the play. For I repeat it, after eight years' mature reflection: "The Dancing Girl" is a drama in three acts, and no one cares what happens when Sybil has diverted the fatal phial from the duke's lips. There may be a marriage, there may be the deluge. But as far as we, the public, are concerned, no more than the three acts are required to send us away satisfied.

A COURT SCANDAL

Jan. 29. 1899.

Plays like "A Court Scandal" can only be enjoyed by imaginative men. It would be futile to seek for real life below the delightful surface of powdered faces and multi-coloured costumes. One might as well study mythology as if it were history itself. So to some these graceful pictures of French Court life in the golden century will probably mean nothing more than deadly "ennui", and whoever approaches these skilful automatic court-scenes in earnest, or with the lens of searching criticism, is not in the right spirit. To enjoy them you should bid farewell to the mill of daily life, with its toil and its worry; you should feel as you do on the night of a fancy dress ball at Covent Garden or at the Paris Opera, when from your box you look down upon a rejuvenated world of masks and fantastic faces.

That the story of young Richelieu's "prouesses" is possibly, or even probably, like the real course of events no one would ever dare to advance. The whole thing is artifice from beginning to end, and it seems almost as if the author was playing chess with his characters all the time, so methodical and so cunning are their moves and words. But it is interesting to a degree, because Bayard and Dumanoir, like all the lesser lights of the period (round 1850), knew the stage as perfectly as the insides of their pockets—knew how to mix a play of colours to a play of words; knew how to keep the interest going, and how to support the main action by invisible beams

of delightful joking, which, unnecessary though it would seem, we should be sorry to miss.

After all, the story how young Richelieu, aged 18, bound in wedlock to Mdlle. de Noailles, with the proviso that he should go to school for a year or two before claiming his marital rights, managed to convince all the world and his bride that he was quite equal to be entrusted with his "*premières armes*," might have been told in one act. For the love letter of Chevalier Matignon and the inevitable duel could have been introduced without all the byplay of the flirtation with the princess and the assignations of the rotund baroness in the Duc's palace. But the cleverness of these authors of the Dumas type lay not in the bold broad portrayal of characters, but in the invention of innumerable incidents, each of which helped to intensify the brilliancy of the entire picture. One might almost summarise their work by comparing it to colour-printing—each hue requires a special passage through the press, yet if the work be good it bears no trace of such a piecemeal operation.

It is somewhat late in the day to try and estimate the artistic value of this kind of play; some will deny that it possesses any at all; but I, for one, in spite of my inclination to the simpler style of our modern playwrights, shall always find it worthy of praise. I admire the amazing cleverness with which the plot is forged, the adroit introduction of fresh details, the wonderful "preparation" (so dear to Sarcey) of the climax, which we expect all the time and which is rarely disappointing; and, above all, I hold that plays of an aristocratic atmosphere with a historical background, with plenty of verve and imagination, with picturesque scenes and touches of heroism, are wholesome diet for the public.

If I remember well, for I saw the "*Premières Armes de Richelieu*" quite twenty-five years ago, the original version was in two acts. The adaptors, Messrs. Aubrey Boucicault and Osmond Shillingford, who were rightly congratulated upon their work, have spun the intrigue into three acts, with the result that, notably in the second part, there are some moments

of languor. The blue pencil, however, will easily remove the excrescences, and, as it stands, the adaptation is a creditable one. Hitherto young Richelieu has always been played by a woman. In fact, Dejazet, the Ninon of the mid-century French stage, played it at the age of seventy-two. It is one of those parts which does not seem incongruous in the hands of a woman. Slim and well-shaped women make, as a rule, charming boys. *Vide* our pantomimes. Why one has departed from the tradition I do not know, but wherever Mr. Seymour Hicks may have fallen short, his appearance was both youthful and striking. He played, too, with great intensity, and never for a moment let the action flag. His manners were, however, essentially modern, and they were highly flavoured with Gaiety essence—aye, I was reminded of the famous Baron Pumpolino in “Cinderella,” as Mr. Hicks jumped about in his chamber-cloak in the first scenes of the second act. Somehow we attribute grace and stateliness to the courtiers and generally to the well-bred classes of the eighteenth century. To define what it was is difficult; it is best expressed in the language, the dances and the music of the time. Now Mr. Hicks constantly reminded us of the present; he was over-energetic, all too exuberant in the movements of hands and feet; the boy Richelieu was all there, but where was His Grace the Duke? His fellow actors were nearly all similarly modern, and therefore outside the picture. Some, like Miss Wood, Miss Ethel Matthews, and Miss Le Thiere, was entirely “a coté,” to say the least of it. Miss Baird looked the part of the Duchesse, but was very amateurish and monotonous; Mr. Ainsworth—fluent and energetic—translated the whole of the book of manners of 1714 in one ever-repeated gesture of the hand; and, curiously enough, Miss Miriam Clements alone, in the few words she had to say, convinced us that she understands the style of acting demanded by costume plays. Moreover, she looked every inch a princess. Mr. J. D. Beveridge was an Abbé full of bonhommie—the very picture of an “Abbé Galant,” but his manners were English and unsuggestive of frills and lace handkerchiefs. The ludicrous

Baron Bellechasse found an excellent exponent in Mr. Brandon Thomas. His usual way of being seemingly phlegmatic and unconcerned was very effective.

As for the mounting of the play, it was full of taste, and so much care was bestowed on the scenery that the very panels in the doors of the Chateau at Versailles bore the monogram of Louis XIII. It is a pleasant production, and I should not be at all astonished to see this Court Scandal successfully spread all over the town.

ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL

The Methuselah of Melodrama.

Febr. 5. 1899.

Some spelt his name Dennery, and some separated the D and the E by an aristocratic apostrophe. Some, again, who pretended to know of his descent, called him Adolphe Philippe Jacob—the last being his surname. But my grandfather, who was of 1809, and who in the prime of his long and distinguished career was Physician to the city of Amsterdam—an office which often brought him within the gates of the ghetto where, *inter alia*, he attended the aunt of Sarah Bernhardt, whose name was Roeg—my grandfather always stoutly maintained that Dennery was really a Dutch “Meyer,” and that his parents had emigrated to Paris. I have never been able to ascertain who was right, but often, when I saw the venerable Dennery pacing in front of his gorgeous villa at Villers-sur-Mer with his bosom friend, Jules Simon, I fancied that I recognised in his patriarchal features the type of the Dutch Jewish families who have impressed their name indelibly on the annals of the Dutch stage, and, as in the case of Arnold Mortier (Mortjé), the first “Monsieur de l’Orchestre” of the *Figaro*, on that of the French.

At Villers, which is the Rottingdean of the Normandy Brighton, “Trouville,” Father Dennery was scarcely accessible, and we who enjoyed the acquaintance of the genial Jules Simon, never ventured to interfere when the two old gentlemen paced, between light and dark, the “planks” on the sea-front. Dennery hated strangers, and except Simon and Valabregue—the author

of "Le Premier Mari de France," and other naughty pieces—no one was admitted into his charmed circle, which was moreover greatly occupied by stars and planets. For in his old age Dennery loved to peep through costly telescopes, perched in a top-room of his villa, into a world unknown.

But if one had the good luck to meet the author in Cabourg, another and more fashionable watering-place hard by Villers, things were different. There he was geniality itself. He was the maker of Cabourg. He, the shrewdest of all dramatists, had one eye on the stage and another on the main chance. He saw how beautifully the village was situated in the embracing arms of the Normandy downs, and how gently the waves played on a neglected shore. He bought acres and acres of what was tantamount to a wilderness. And when he had them he began to build. And when he had built he began to sell. And when the Parisians found that the renowned author of "The Two Orphans" had created a new health resort on the fertile coast, where the Belles Normandes (the cows) thrive, they went and bought the ground and made the venturesome dramatist a manifold millionaire. Dennery was proud of his Cabourg, and he was perhaps prouder of his chain of mayoralty than of the necklace of the Legion of Honour, which in his capacity as playwright the third Napoleon bestowed on him in 1859.

In prolificness Dennery was unique. He even surpassed Dumas Père, who was his contemporary and friend, but who never equalled him in steadiness and zeal. No less than 210 pieces, to say nothing of what may be found in his drawers now that he is dead, are associated with his name. He has collaborated with nearly all the writers of France between the fifties and the eighties, and even Balzac did not despise his assistance in the remodelling of "Mercadet," which, in its first form, was anything but stage-worthy.

Anicet-Bourgeois, Cormon, Cremieux, Dumanoir (author of "A Court Scandal"), Thiboust, Decourcelle (of "The Two Little Vagabonds")—to name a few—all were his coadjutors in pro-

viding Paris and the world with melodramas, and some of these authors, who had done successful work on their own account, owe their entire initiation into stage-craft to their association with Dennery, to whom the stage was but a little Cabourg—a domain which he knew as well as the lining of his own pocket. Nor can it be said of old Dennery that, like Dumas the elder, and for the benefit of his purse, he fathered the works of other people merely with his name. It was quite the other way about. The collaborators worked the minor part and Dennery the principal; he was boundless in resource, and a ceaseless source of invention. Jules Verne, whose books are still read on both sides of the Channel, owes it to his friendly intercourse with Dennery, from which sprang "The Journey Round the World in Eighty Days" and "The Children of Captain Grant," that his name has indeed travelled over the two hemispheres in an incredibly short time, and that his works are translated into every civilised tongue.

Of course, it is the fashion nowadays to laugh at Dennery. Young France and, for the matter of that, all the apostles of modernity, decline to acknowledge his great gifts. More than that, in his very hey-dey Theophile Gautier and his mental kinsmen jibed at the dramatic monstrosities, as they called them, which provoked the guffaws of the illiterate and the tears of the vulgar. But Dennery himself never minded what people said about him. He never pretended to soar very high—his "Martyre," written in ripe old age, was avowedly his most ambitious effort; his sole intention was to provide the crowd with wholesome fare and to make money. Judged by my usual standard of criticism I should be expected to despise Dennery for that. Am I not always down upon the poor carpenters who nail together humble melodramas? So I am, for the very reason that I was growing up in the days when Dennery was universally popular. And I for one decline to class Dennery among the inept writers of sensational pieces. He became perhaps too much of a business man to be a thorough artist; but an artist born he was, and he had a gift of vitalising his

imagination which is simply unsurpassable. Some of us remember his "Don Cesar de Bazan," his "Old Corporal," his "Marie Jeanne," his "Centenaire," his intense "Prayer of the Shipwrecked," and when one talks to us about these plays now we are inclined to shrug our shoulders and to indulge in the supercilious smile of people who have left these "enfantillages" far behind them and are almost ashamed of such lowly acquaintances. But come, when we hark back in real earnest and remember that we too have been young and credulous and unaffected by the stern realities of the world, must we not admit that we have laughed and cried over these spotless heroes, these angelic heroines, these lurid villains, all of whom seemed to be so dead in earnest in their chequered pursuits? And if you deny the recollection of these plays, is there one of you, well in the thirties like myself, who has not shuddered and felt his heart beat when in "The Two Orphans" the crippled Jacques fights his stalwart brother Pierre "all for her sake"? You may say "no," but in your thoughts you cannot fail to follow me with a hear-hear; for Dennerly, the brilliant executant he was, played upon the heartstrings of the human fiddle to perfection, and the conjurer he was bamboozled us with his tricks during the performance, and even afterwards, when we had found him out.

And suppose, for argument's sake, that we contemporaries refuse to acknowledge merits, literary, artistic, and histrionic, in the man who has just gone to rest after eighty-eight years of hard work, there is one thing which no one who knows the stage can gainsay. It is this, that Dennerly by his plays has been a very high-school for teaching actors their business. For his melodramas demanded acting in the strongest sense of the word—characterisation, force, pathos, and humour; and whoever knows how to bring these out is sure to make his way; and whoever fails needs no candid friend to convince him that he will never be the conquering hero of the stage.

To the last Dennerly preserved his predilection for things theatrical; to the last his faculties shone unimpaired. His very will, which may be hotly disputed by some of his relatives, was made at Villers under circumstances reminiscent

of his melodramas. One day, quite recently, he gathered a few friends in his drawing-room, and begged them to listen to his latest play. He unfolded the plot before them, and his graphic delineations were frequently interrupted by applause. When he had done, and everyone was astonished at the clearness and the directness of the old man's language, he asked: "Are you convinced, my friends, that I am perfectly *compos mentis*?" "Of course," they answered, in unison. "Very well, then," he said, proceeding to open the folding doors of the adjoining room with an "Entrez, messieurs! Here are two notaries and their clerks; I will now beg you to witness the posthumous fate of my fortune."

THE NEW CENTURY THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF
"GRIERSON'S WAY," BY H. V. ESMOND

Feb. 12. 1899.

Henceforth H. V. Esmond is a dramatist to be reckoned with. "Grierson's Way" is a play that will command the respect not only of London and New-York, but all of the most critical centres of Europe. For it is original, it is fresh, it is vigorous. I feel inclined to add and to emphasise that it is modern, but as that term is likely to be misunderstood, I whisper it softly, lest our bourgeois might become prejudiced against the young author. Has not the term "modern" become akin to Ibsen? And is Ibsen not—well, you know what he is according to Mr. John Hare and—other critics.

But the fact is indisputable. "Grierson's Way" has achieved a great, a magnificent success, and to say that it is the best original play that has been seen on the London stage in the last five years is not to exaggerate one jot, for it is the truth, the joyful truth.

"Grierson's Way" has succeeded, not because it was brilliant, but because it was human. Yet it was brilliant too, and I defy anyone to show me in any recent English work, except the plays of Bernard Shaw, dialogue that is finer, crisper, more natural than the language with which Mr. Esmond has vitalised his characters.

A narrow-minded person alone could take exception to the story, which by this time is familiar to all the town, so that I need but refer to its points.

What is more natural than that Grierson, aged fifty, and

over head and ears in love with Pamela Ball, should offer her his hand, not in spite of, but because of her having loved not wisely but too well? That he should take the love-child under the shelter of his name? That, in spite of the affection he bestows on his wife, she should be lonely, bored, unhappy, yearning for the other man? And that, when that other man returns, her whole heart should go out to him?

Good Heavens! the Philistines and Mrs. Grundy will cry out—how shocking! how utterly impossible! Well, let them clamour if they like, but that will not shake my conviction that the story is both moral and highly probable. In fact, the whole story is typically British. And to be British is, as a rule, to be chivalrous. Here is Jim Grierson. He has reached the age when a man seeks in a woman companionship above all other privileges of a union. He loves the girl with all the serene autumnal fervour of middle age. The world has taught him to realise to the full what it means to take a woman for better or for worse. And when that woman, through a slip of her own wilful foot, is threatened with destruction in a moral abyss, he saves her. Quixotism? Yes, perhaps it is, but Don Quichote was a cavalier before all, and in the middle-class London life this ancient grandeur of character is by no means extinct, as the Police Court proceedings may now and again teach us.

What happens next may not be the absolute rule, but it is certainly not the exception. Not to mince matters, the first man is in most cases impregnably immured in the heart of the women who loved him. There is no getting away from the fact, for the transition from girlhood to womanhood is the greatest crisis in female life, and, with the image of her lover in her bosom and before her—in the darling child that was so skilfully woven into the action, and for the first time reconciled us to children upon the stage—it was in the fitness of things that Pamela should be unhappy with Grierson, and that she should make him feel all the time that her life was clouded.

Then the inevitable happens. The man comes back, and

what has been smouldering in the wife's heart, is kindled. Yet she suppresses it. She has bought peace with her hand, and peace with honour it shall be. The husband, a good soul, one of those whom nature has left to grow up in perennial childhood, does not forbid him the door. It will please Pamela. And what pleases Pamela pleases him. So the first visit is followed by a second—a mere call at tea-time, when Grierson fiddles next door, and the two old lovers exchange commonplace talk—admirable scene!—which is like the calm that heralds a storm. But the high tide of passion breaks down all barriers, and she is all his once more. She tells him that the babe yonder on the sofa is *his* boy. That now, as then, as ever, he is her love, her life, her husband! And to-morrow she bids him come—and he can guess the rest. When the husband enters and finds her agitated, he tries to soothe and comfort her. But she repels him.

So far—up to the end of the third act—we are entirely with the author. "First man wins" is his theory, and in his bold picture of life we find nothing that is not human. So simply the truth has scarcely ever flowed from the pen of an English dramatist. But now comes the solution. That is, the solution which Mr. Esmond wishes to force upon us, for we—I think I speak for the majority—are satisfied that the end of the third act is virtually and naturally the end of the story. We guess what should, what must happen "to-morrow." Flight or farewell for ever. Everything else is unwarranted by the evolution. But we have overlooked a character—a youth who had once been a musician of great promise, and whose left hand had been crippled in a railway accident, thereby blighting his prospects and his hopes. Dissatisfied, bitter, addicted to drink he is, like the croaking raven, the evil genius of the family. He, a curious mixture of Ibsen-Maeterlinck symbolism, and wholly theatrical, has also been in love with Pamela, and the author uses him to bring about the catastrophe. Practically the character has nothing to do with the action, and in real life such a creature would from the outset have been kicked across the threshold. Yet, there he is—the

one inexplicable factor in the play; and often worrying everybody, he finally drives Grierson to take the poison which in his delirium he has come to offer him. The scene between the two men is powerful to a degree, and in it many things are said which harass our feelings. But it all seemed superfluous, and when, after Grierson's death—which occurred at the moment when the lover rang at the door for the promised answer, while the wife, overcome with grief, for the first time realises what her husband was to her—the maniac exclaimed, "The dead man wins!" I confess that I saw the curtain descend with a feeling of rank bewilderment.

So that was the outcome of the problem—not the great, lasting influence of the lover, but the sudden overpowering awe of death. It was disappointing, for it undid a picture which was perfectly finished in the third act, by springing upon us a new thesis—a thesis, moreover, which must remain unproven, since in the logic of the human heart a young woman like Pamela would not allow the dead man's victory to be lasting. No, no! Plead as you will, you may theatrically gain your cause—for the stage allows unlimited license—but in life, when the shock of the husband's death is over, and the first man is of such honest fibre as the lover in this play, there can be no doubt who will be victorious. In six months the weeds will wither, and in a year the marriage bells will peal.

My objections to the last act are purely psychological. Theatrically my only objection to it would be its expansion, but the workmanship is excellent. And so it is in the entire play. I have praised the conception, evolution, and construction, and am glad to praise it again and again, as such an achievement deserves. Even the eccentric musician, once his existence is condoned, is drawn by an expert hand who knows the stage in its trickiest corners. But the time is near when Mr. Esmond, who will, I wager, be overwhelmed with commissions from now, may devote his entire talent and energy to playwriting alone. And then, when he is no longer an actor, he will no doubt discard the introduction of characters which, however effective

they may be, are unessential, aye, detrimental, to his portrayal of human life.

The play inspired the players. The acting reminded me of the best days of the Independent Theatre. It was far, far above the average; everyone seemed to be bent on triumph. And almost from first to last the performance was as memorable as the drama. That Mr. Esmond himself was weird, intense, powerful as the musician, goes without saying. He is always interesting, and if he would only be constantly himself, and not yearn for the pectoral accents of Mr. Wyndham, he would be unremittingly impressive. Mr. Barnes was fine, and bluff and breezy as an old sea-captain—Pamela's father, whom I have not mentioned in my narrative, as he is a mere utility in the play. But he supplied the few bright notes which the author allowed to pervade his gloomy theme. Mr. Tetheradge, as Grierson, was at first somewhat monotonous; he reminded me forcibly of Tesman, in "Hedda Gabler," to whom the character is not altogether unrelated. But he gradually warmed to his work, exhibiting the weakness, yet all the tenderness and amiability of the man, and in the last act previous to his determination to die, he had moments of real tragic power. It was a touching impersonation, and one in which there was no striving after effect. Pamela is a personality which only one woman could render to perfection, Miss Duse. I say this by no means to discount Miss Ashwell's talent, but to demonstrate how great I consider the possibilities of the character to be. On the English stage, I honestly believe that no one (with the exception of Miss Robins) could have been better than Miss Ashwell. And I ask in wonderment why the former did not play the part. However, Miss Ashwell was very successful. At first she too indulged in a uniform delivery, which is her fault sometimes. And she certainly was not adequate in the scene where Grierson proposed to her, and she was answering him, while she stared out of the window all the time. That scene demanded suppressed emotion, not mere inertness. Miss Ashwell, who may have suffered from nervousness, and conquered it as the play proceeded, rose with the action.

Her first meeting with her lover was perfect in its display of suppressed emotion; in the next, during the tea-tattle, she was wonderfully composed, yet we felt the vehement undercurrent all the time; and the cry with which she repelled her husband at the end of the third act was truly heart-rending. It was a performance that will mark progress in her career. The Captain Aynesley (the lover) of Mr. Terry was masterly from first to last. First courtly and graceful; then curt and ill at ease in his restraint; finally bursting into a very eruption of passion, Mr. Terry made the character vital and thoroughly sympathetic, and rendered yeoman service to the play.

From all points of view it was a proud afternoon for those who love the British drama, and it is no flattery to congratulate the author and the New Century Theatre Society on having given us a play which will long outlive the closing century.

LYCEUM THEATRE: "THE ONLY WAY"
"A TALE OF TWO CITIES."

Feb. 19. 1899.

It was a plucky act of Mr. Martin Harvey to assume the responsibilities of the Lyceum, and his valour has been deservedly rewarded: "The Only Way" is a success.

Whether or not the Rev. Freeman Will's melodrama is founded on Dickens' famous novel is one question, and whether it will bear comparison with other plays inspired by the same book is another. But I am not very much concerned with either, for I admit that my memory of the novel, which belongs to my boyhood, is hazy, and I know less of the successful adaptations of a score of years ago.

"The Only Way" is, therefore, to me what it must be to the majority of playgoers, a new melodrama worked on an old plot, and as such I do not hesitate to pronounce it a very good, a vigorous, and a stirring tale of romance. Nor is there very much in it which betrays its bookish origin; perhaps the action is sometimes a little episodic; perhaps the main character shines out too brilliantly in comparison with all the others; perhaps there is a good deal of jerky suddenness in the culmination of events; but, perhaps, also, we should not have noticed all this if we had not been accessories before the acts.

Yet with all our prescience I do not think that anybody failed to follow the action with interest, for it was, from the prologue in which St. Evrémonde killed Defarge (and a more "life-like" corpse than Mr. Holbrook Blinn I have never seen,

except at the Morgue), a very interesting story, which in the third act—the trial—grew deeply pathetic, not to say harrowing. The first two acts, which were laid in London, partly in Sidney Carton's chambers, partly in Dr. Manette's delightful garden in Soho, had their weak points. There were too many long duologues in the former, and far too many rhetorical fireworks in the latter, although Mr. Harvey, admirably discreet as the drunken young barrister, almost redeemed the opening scenes of the real drama. The second act also might have made a deeper impression if Mr. Herbert Sleath, who improves, but is not yet a master of elocution, had been more effective and natural in his amorous protestations, and if Miss Grace Warner, charming to behold, possessed the gift of (figuratively) filling the stage and holding the audience. But let that pass, for our patience was not to go unrewarded.

In the *entre-acte* between the second and third acts there happened many things which we should like to have heard explained, for it was a big stride from Carton's and Darnay's (*alias* St. Evrémonde) departure from London to the dock in the revolutionary tribunal. Such manœuvres are, however, most common in melodramas, and he who will be a wise man takes them for granted. And, to speak the truth, once we were well in the turmoil of the trial-scene, there was no time for much critical reflection, for the climax, which had now been reached, was overwhelming. The masses were most skilfully grouped, the yells and the shouts of the Jacobin mob had nothing theatrical about them, but sounded terribly genuine, the proceedings of the bench were conducted with as much dignity as one could have expected in the days of the Terror, and the accused and his bride exhibited such grief that in the auditorium ladies' handkerchiefs were furtively produced. Then came the speech which Sidney Carton delivered for the defence, and although to my ear it did not sound as passionately written as the occasion demanded, it burst from Mr. Harvey's lips as a magnificent oration. Whoever doubted that Mr. Harvey was not only a subtle, but also a strong actor, must now be convinced of his vigour. Of course, that

remarkable touch of dreaminess, of ethereality, which was so evident in his Pelleas, was not absent, but it was wedded to a grand outburst of unbridled emotion; and as he stood there, the young advocate, his eye aflame, his features pallid, his breast heaving, his acting was so sincere, so convincing, that one cannot but predict for him a great future. Later again when the last hour had sounded, and Carton forfeited his life to save her whom he loved, Mr. Harvey made a great impression, but now it was by his composure, by the sobriety of his words and the suppression of his emotions. The play should have ended when he and Mimi—acted with exquisite delicacy and tenderness by Miss de Silva (Mrs. Harvey) — ascended the steps of the Conciergerie to surrender to death and the evil joy of the populace. The last tableau, the guillotine, with its gruesome knife glittering in the rays of the lime-light, was a mistake. It was picturesque, yes, but it was horrible, it sent us away with fears of bad dreams and hallucinations. And truly the play had been sad enough, so sad that the few flashes of humour scarcely penetrated the gloom.

Before I conclude, I must pay my tribute to Mr. Ben Webster for a capital little sketch of a genuine "Pair de France," and one more to Mr. Holbrook Blinn, whose Doctor in "The Cat and the Cherub," revealed an actor of no mean attainments. He did not seem quite familiar with the extent of the vast auditorium before him, and more than once he sank his voice so low that not even the stalls, let alone the pit, could understand him. But, apart from that, his acting was very fine indeed. What Rutland Barrington does as a comic actor, Mr. Blinn practises in the serious line; he is seemingly neither emotional nor theatrical; he is altogether an ordinary human being in manner and in speech. Yet under that calm surface there lurks plenty of passion, and when it broke out in the third act, as Defarge denounced Darnay, the sentences fell like sledgehammers, forcibly, sonorously, impressively. It was a worthy pendant to the eloquence of Mr. Martin Harvey. If only all the minor characters had been equally good! Where is the broadness of manner and diction, the "grand style," upon

which the triumphant career of the old melodramatic school was built? It has apparently vanished in the namby-pamby atmosphere of the modern drawing-room play, and that is a pity. However, in spite of such underacting, "The Only Way" held its own. For there is grit in the play, and there is enough panache in Mr. Harvey to overcome a host of obstacles.

TERRY'S: "SWEET LAVENDER"

Feb. 26. 1899.

It seemed like old times when the curtain rose. The hands had gone back and the calendar was forgotten. How we welcomed all, and shook them by the hand, the dear old pals, Dick Phenyl, Clemmy-my-boy, Sweet Lavender, and Mr. Bream, the irresistible Yankee, who pursued the policy of the "open door" with a vengeance.

Somehow, as soon as Mr. Bulger, the hairdresser, entered the chambers in the Temple with his brass pannikin, and his failing H's, we felt thoroughly at home among the ancient lights, and when drunken doddering Dick swayed in, our hearts went out to him. Never mind his scraggy beard, never mind his untidy dress, never mind his aversion from teetotalism and his intermittent brusqueness, we love him, for we know him to be a good sort, a friend in need, and one whom with a little praise you might twist round your finger. Dick is, perhaps, a little too much of a caricature to answer exactly to the type of lights that failed, which are not uncommon in the Temple, but his good heart is true to life, and his queer mannerisms are likewise to be observed daily in the Bohemia of Fleet-street. Clemmy, on the other hand, is a splendid and unflattered picture of a young Englishman of twenty odd; he is as straight as a die, as true as steel, and not for a moment does the gulf which yawns between Lavender, the housekeeper's daughter, and himself, the banker's adopted son, influence his feelings. He knows only one sort of love, that which leads to the altar, and chivalrous as he is, he treats the

lowly-born little woman with even more reverence than the bride whom the family would fain see him marry. This Miss Gilfillian is, if not the most prominent, the most remarkable character of the play. She is a Sunday-school teacher and a flirt. Of course she hates to be told so. She is as prim, as narrow, and as capricious a little "English Meess" as could be fashioned to gladden the ironic spirit of our French neighbours. She plays a high game, blows hot and cold with her new suitor, freezes him when mamma is by, kindles and fondles his affection "on the stairs" when he comes in the afternoon to inquire after the health of Clemmy's adopted father. Altogether a character drawn with a bold hand, in my eyes not a very attractive one, yet very true. It is the sort of English girl that is partly responsible for our foreign reputation of "perfidiousness;" it is the sort of girl that slips into and out of engagements as if they were so many pairs of gloves, and is not infrequently represented in the annals of the divorce-court. I make these observations by no means to censure the character from a dramatic or artistic point of view, for it is a most amusing one, but to show how one opinion may traverse that of the multitude. As a rule, in fact, Miss Gilfillian is praised as an element of sweetness in this delightful play. I find it an element of amusement on one hand, and on the other a type of modern society of a not altogether agreeable composition, for Miss Gilfillian does not write to Bream, "Horace, come back," until she is convinced that her fast and loose toying will end in an irreparable loss.

Bream himself is a wonderful invention. He is all stars and stripes: full of clever ideas and odd quips. He is the concentrated extract of all the resourceful Americans whom one has to deal with in business, or meets in society. Curiously enough, Sweet Lavender is the palest of all the principal figures who compose this domestic picture. Mr. Pinero has given her little to do, little to say; we do not see much of her, nor are we allowed to penetrate deeply into her soul. She is winning and sweet as the flower whose name she bears; her personality fills the stage with a fragrance which is indescribable and bewitching. She reminds one of those women who cross

one's path in society and vanish, leaving only a delicate and unforgettable cloud of scent behind them. Yet they have made a lasting impression.

Since Mr. Pinero has written "Sweet Lavender," he has undoubtedly achieved greater things. This play was, at it were, the opening chapter of his second volume; it ended with "The Weaker Sex," as his first cycle terminated with "Dandy Dick." Then followed (in 1889) "The Profligate," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," and others, all well-known plays, which tackled life with a bolder hand and stated problems to be deeply thought over and hotly discussed. "Sweet Lavender" is quite another matter; it is not to be taken seriously as a picture of life; its one object is to amuse, to raise a smile, to provoke a not too uncomfortable sigh, and then send us home happy. And in this the author has succeeded to perfection. Of its kind, "Sweet Lavender" is almost a little masterpiece. And it would be so altogether if melodrama had not been pressed into its service. So long as the play runs on the lines of comedy pure and simple, that is to say until the old banker appears, and with the aid of the long arm of coincidence discovers that Lavender is the result of his youthful affection for the housekeeper in the Temple, so long as the crash of Wedderburn's bank does not operate as a "deus ex machina" to avenge and to reclaim, the action is beyond criticism. It is comedy of the finest quality—fascinating, joyful and brilliant. But towards the middle of the second act the story runs into a fresh groove, and while coincidence overwhelms verisimilitude, harmony is upset by a jarring note. Perhaps it did not strike us so eleven years ago, but in those days there had been (with apologies to Mr. John Hare) no "upheaval" of realism, and (again with due deference to the said after-dinner-speaker) since then we have made some progress both in technique and in manner. For this reason some must now feel that the mechanism of the play squeaks here and there, as if age had already eaten its vitals; but as soon as the comedy vein towards the end gained the upper hand once more, the fascination came back, and, on the whole, the re-

vival was pronounced a great success, and the play hailed with unfeigned cordiality.

The part of Dick Phenyl, the bibulous and big-hearted barrister, marked the climax in Mr. Edward Terry's career, when he created it in 1888. And now again it must be declared that in the eleven years which are gone he has done nothing equal to it. Part and actor are indissolubly united, and so long as Mr. Terry is Dick Phenyl, the play will live. The flow of time has scarcely damaged the actor's performance; it has only, perhaps, accentuated some of its sharp edges. There is a tendency to make the comedy altogether "Dick Phenyl," and to drive all the other characters into the background. Mr. Terry takes time over his jokes, his business and his speeches; thus the action is slowed down to the discomfort—not to say the discomfiture—of the younger actors. But who will alter that? Mr. Terry is an actor-manager, and when he shines, all other stars must pale. In spite of that the performance is masterly. The dramatist knew every peculiarity of the actor, and he has taken advantage of them to the fullest extent. The result is a most effective combination of the personality of the actor and of his gifts. Dick Phenyl is a tragicomic creature, and Mr. Terry is a tragicomic actor *par excellence*. His enunciation, when it is to be merry, never fails to raise a laugh, and when it is to be sad, it is just pathetic enough to appeal to us without causing us to forget the innate humour of the character. Mr. Terry was something more than interesting from first to last, and his famous ejaculations, such as "Clemmy my boy," "Shall we toss for it?" and "For the defendant", evoked as much laughter as if they were being heard for the first instead of for the thousandth time.

Miss Calotta Addison's Ruth Rolt was as sweet as ever, and Mr. Ben Webster was the most refined Bream we have so far seen. That he did not overdo the American accent, which no Englishman can possibly spice with its real flavour, was also to his credit. The thin ranks of our *jeunes premiers* will one of these days be swelled by Mr. Marsh Allen. He is very young yet to all appearance, and will have to acquire more freedom

of movement. But he has a most agreeable presence, a fine voice, and, best of all, he feels what he says. His Clement Hale was fresh, hale, and hearty, and forecasts a very promising future. Miss Maud Millet has been prevailed upon to return to the stage to resume the part of Miss Gilfillian. It was, no doubt, a tribute to tradition on the part of her manager. To my mind Miss Millet is not, and was never, the ideal representative of that character. She is what one calls theatrically a "hard" actress; her limitations are palpable at all times; her gaiety is as superficial as the expression of her emotions, and her attitudes are always photographic. She makes an excellent picture both on the stage and through the camera, and that is about all. By the way, has it not occurred to Miss Millet (or, for the matter of that, to anybody concerned with the production) how incongruous was her appearance in the last act? Has one ever seen such elegance of costume and such starchy-studied neatness—enhanced by a wired and flaming red rose, in a girl who is bent upon housework and sick-nursing? It is very pretty to look at, no doubt, but it spoils the picture of the play, and is therefore inartistic.

The most difficult task of all fell to Miss Nina Boucicault, who followed Miss Rose Norreys and Miss Blanche Horlock as Lavender. I, for one, think that scarcely justice has been done the young actress, who played the part for all it is worth; and it is really absurd that, because Miss Boucicault has now and again been called upon to impersonate pert girls with glib tongues, some people should find that Lavender is not really suited to her. It goes to show that in criticism, as in many other matters, the label determines everything. Miss Boucicault has played vixens and such like, therefore she must not touch emotional characters. It is all nonsense. Miss Boucicault is an emotional actress, albeit that she is an excellent comedienne, and what she can achieve she has shown as Lavender. Her performance was as sweet, as tender, I should like to say, as modest as the little lavender flower itself. And when in the first act, while she was sorting the library, she discovered the volume inscribed "Clement Hale," and pressed it to her breast, she

revealed in the sigh with which she read the name an infinite fund of sincerity, which was more telling than many a long speech.

The revival of "Sweet Lavender" was in every respect a happy thought. It has shown some excellent acting, it has renewed our acquaintance with a play that must be dear to our playgoers, because it is highly entertaining, homely, and English in the truest sense of the word. It will do something more than attract the people to the theatre. The book, too, which has been published some years ago, will be read over again, and its perusal will confuse those detractors who would deny the gift of literary style to Pinero. We have but to turn over the leaves of "Sweet Lavender" and enjoy the brightness of his humours and his rapid and felicitous presentation of men and manners, to be convinced that here is not only a good acting-play, but a very pleasant and skilful piece of literature.

AVENUE THEATRE: "THE CUCKOO."

March 5. '99.

Thus spake Zarathustra—of the old school:

"Décoré," the original of Mr. C. H. Brookfield's play was a very clever work. But then it was by Mr. Henri Meilhac, who, with his collaborator, Ludovic Halevy, has enriched French literature with many works of genius.

"Décoré" was a naughty play, but to be Parisian is to be naughty, so we may forgive the author for introducing the well-worn subject of marital infidelity, or would-be infidelity, as the mainspring of the plot. We hasten to add that nothing very serious really happens, and that the story is not nearly so spicy as, for instance, "Pink Dominoes," "A Night Out," or "Never Again." One must be very ill-disposed indeed to detect suggestiveness in "The Cuckoo," but we leave that to the modern unimaginative school, whose adepts are ever prone to discover a mud-splash on a dress of virginal white. True, we should like some allusions in the second act (references to "women of that sort," to "our room", in the dialogue between the hero who has been on an escapade to be with his friend's wife) excised; but there is so much cleverness in the play, it provokes so much genuine laughter, and the situations are so excessively droll, that one may well wink the other eye and forgive these little aberrations of taste.

Mr. Brookfield has mastered his difficult task of bowdlerising a somewhat risky story with great skill. In fact, we have no hesitation in declaring that once more the much-maligned British adapter has materially improved the work of the Boulevard author, and that he has given Mr. Charles Hawtrey a

great opportunity for displaying his particular gifts of adulterating the truth in a harmless and delightful manner.

"The Cuckoo" was an instantaneous success, and in response to vociferous calls for the author, Mr. Charles Hawtrey could only come forward and express his regret that the author was unable to make his bow, as he was away in the South of France.

And then the band played.

In order that you may take your choice, we will now see what the new school has to say.

I do not for one moment deny the cleverness of "Décoré." Nor would I deny that Mr. Brookfield's adaptation is adroit, and in places brilliant. But "The Cuckoo" is, in my estimation, unsuited to the majority of our playgoers. Of course the first-nighters laughed immoderately at every line which was charged with several meanings, and at every word which threatened to pass the bounds of propriety. They always do, for a large percentage of first-nighters is Bohemian, and they are not afraid of a little "Paprika." The general public, however, is in another position. Things that men may like to hear in the smoking-room, they would not tolerate in the society of their wives and daughters; and, relying on the official watchdog, the Censor, they expect every play to be free from suggestiveness. "The Cuckoo" is hardly that. It is amusing, but laughter is sometimes provoked at the expense of good taste.

I am adverse to cynical immorality—to thinly veiled suggestiveness on the English stage, as I am adverse to women who unduly bare their bosoms, for in both cases decency is outraged. And we must not allow the theatre to become an instrument of corruption. I am speaking only of the English stage, for in France the public have other tastes, and the playhouse is not frequented by the family, unless the play is absolutely innocuous. Moreover, our language does not lend itself to skating on thin ice, nor do our actors understand what the French call "to glide and not to press."

What is piquant in French becomes coarse in English, and what the French actor speaks with airy grace, the English actor, with his slower tongue and his heavier movements,

serves up in such a way that its unpleasantness is accentuated. Now "The Cuckoo" teems with all sorts of doubtful matter, and it even brings a person on the stage, who by the vulgarity of her utterances (clever though they may be) ranks lower than the *demi-mondaine*. The plot too is poor. Ingenious it is to a degree. The idea of foisting the reward of heroism on one who has never done a brave deed in his life, but is compelled to accept the medal and the cuckoo-clock, because he has been guilty of an adventure which would constrain a married man to remain silent—the "starting-point" is capital. Unfortunately it cannot be developed without complications fringing on adultery, for the real "hero" has, with clearly defined intentions, carried off the other man's wife to a riverside hotel, and but for the timely interference of a lion, broken loose from his cage, he would have betrayed his friendship to the full. It is that which disturbs me particularly in the play. Escapades are well and good; boys will be boys, whether they be married or single; but the notion of a man's wilfully endeavouring to lead his friend's wife astray is unpleasant, particularly in farce, where these things are treated with a levity that amuses the crowd, although they must inwardly abhor it.

Still, leaving the plot out of the question, there was no necessity to spice the dialogue so richly as Mr. Brookfield has done. He rightly enjoys the reputation of being a witty man; but risky things are cheap, and it would have been much better to flavour the conversation with more salt and less pepper. That Mr. Brookfield is perfectly able to do this, he has proved in "The Cuckoo" by his parodies of "English as she wrote" by the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*. That is excellent fun indeed, which will be equally enjoyed by those who laugh and those who are laughed at.

There are also some very clever little scenes in "The Cuckoo," ranging from pure comedy to pungent satire. The reception of the Indian King at Maidensbourne is a gem, and Mr. Hawtrey's description of his fight with the lion is of irresistible drollery. But "The Cuckoo" did not succeed on the first night mainly on account of its cleverness: naughtiness,

well-sustained as it was through many and absurd monologues and dawdling passages in the second act, is the main factor of its prosperity. And as surely as the forbidden fruit tempted our parents in Eden, "The Cuckoo" will draw many and large audiences to the Avenue. Did not our "Censor Morum" read and license the play and thereby absolve our consciences?

The new school has taken far more space than the old in dealing with the play, for the new had something fresh to say and is not wont to condemn with mere adjectives and vituperation. Moreover, the old school always relates the plot (which spoils the curiosity of the reader and is mostly an injury to the author), from which I will abstain, as all the morning papers have told it *ad nauseam*. The play was, perhaps, not worth so much attention, but it involves a principle. Once more "smut-tiness" is slowly creeping into our farces, and as it is a thing to be avoided, I have on this occasion fully expounded the whys and the wherefores; they will hold good for all the tainted articles that are borrowed for us second hand from such theatres as the Variétés, the Vaudeville, and the Palais-Royal. As for the interpretation I think we all agreed—whether we liked the play or not. Mr. Hawtrey's cool method is always telling. He is an admirable comedian, and his humour flows almost imperceptibly. Sometimes indeed I noticed that his composure degenerated into inertness, as if he were convinced that he cannot but amuse. Exaggeration in that direction is, I fear, a mistake. However well Mr. Hawtrey speaks his words, he must not forget that on the stage acting is imperative, and in the manner he rendered some of his monologues they seemed to miss fire. They were undoubtedly long, but want of emphasis made them a little wearisome.

Mr. Arthur William lacks refinement, and his humour is a contrast to Mr. Hawtrey's. The young school insists too little and the old school too much. Mr. Williams belongs to the old school. Miss Constance Collier played the unpleasant part of the Cocotte. She did it with marvellous verve—one would fain say she studied the character from life. Her fine performance in "One Summer's Day" is unforgotten, and

this last achievement is further evidence of her great abilities. The waiter of Mr. Charles E. Stevens was a capital sketch. His Jocrisse-like appearance alone was funny, but his manner—familiar and confidential, we all know it, was even more amusing. He shared the evening's laurels with Miss Collier and Mr. Hawtrey. Smaller characters were excellently interpreted by Mr. Volpe (the Mayor), Mr. Coryton (the Nigger-King), and Mr. Hugh Goring, the editor of the "Cuckoo," who allotted the reward of bravery. The one weak spot in the performance was the acting of Miss Fanny Ward. Above all, her voice is unpleasant ; it is untrained, hard, and monotonous. Her gestures are amateurish, she does not know how to rule the stage, in spite of her constant occupation of the centre in front of the footlights ; she speaks to the audience, not to her fellow-players, or, in monologue, to herself, and conscious as she seems to be of what she says, she does not charge it with meaning. Thus a long soliloquy in the third act almost elicited impatience. It was the worst bit of elocution I have heard for some time, and I tremble to think what Mr. Gilbert would have said if he had heard it. Why the part was given to Miss Ward is a riddle—the more as Miss Lottie Venne, who would have played it to perfection, was available. It was a bad service to Miss Ward to overtax her so, and it hampered the play. In small parts, such as smart chambermaids, soubrettes, &c., Miss Ward may pass muster, but it is wrong to entrust to her a character in which only a fully accomplished comedienne could succeed. Whether Miss Ward has it in her to reach that position it is not easy to say. In the "Cuckoo" there was only evidence of limitations, not of talent. If we had an academy, Miss Ward might possibly acquire that versatility of which she is so sadly in need.

THEATRE METROPOLE: "THE MAYFLOWER."

March 12. '99.

One thing Mr. Louis Napoleon Parker has in common with many dramatists. He does not understand the subtle art of rounding off his work. His last acts are lamentable; remember "Rosemary;" remember "The Happy Life;" remember "The Vagabond King." I doubt whether after twenty or two dozen experiments on the London stage—a record unparalleled and singularly barren of lasting results—he will ever learn to write the needful "*finis coronat*" successfully under his opus. For it is a peculiar gift, that of building a roof that neither leaks nor lets the draught in, nor threatens to kill the builder by loose and falling tiles; and whoever does not know how to do it will assuredly lag behind in his profession.

To write a good first act is fairly easy, for that is generally merely exposition. To write a good second act is more difficult, yet no overwhelming task, for when the curtain descends, the greater the involution, the keener the public's curiosity. That is why in farces the second act—like the middle of a salmon—is the best part of all. But to write a good third act, and to bring things satisfactorily to a close, that is not only a very arduous task, but, in fact, the crucial test of the playwright's strength.

This explanation is in itself an extenuating circumstance—not for this author only, but for all of them; and in the case of "The Mayflower" it is sadly needed. Its concluding act is of unexampled badness. Up to the end of the second act, which culminated in a strong dramatic scene, things had gone fairly well; the story, which Mr. Parker will tell anon in his own

words, had run its course undisturbed, and if it was not a particularly clever or original one, it was generally voted pretty—a pretty picture in a delightful antique frame. But the third act spoiled it all.

Now, let me give the story, as Mr. Parker has summarised it for the benefit of his first-night audience, for it will make it clearer to my readers why the play collapsed.

The story of the "Mayflower" showeth how Mistress Joan Mallory loved my Lord Gervase Carew, the son of her father's cruel enemy, who was like to have brought her to ruin; how Roger Mallory, her father, with all his house, joined the pilgrims who set sail in the "Mayflower," as we read in history, and so sought safety for himself and his child in the plantations; how, being got there, Jack Poynings would have had her to wife, and how Joan was minded to die of her sorrow; how the memory of her purity cleansed Gervase of his sins, so that (casting off his titles and estates) he followed after her amid great hardship and privation, and, at the last, proved himself worthy to be her mate; together with the profane oaths of Captain Jones, the surprising marriage of Mijneer Willem Hundius (a young Hollander) and Mistress Cicely Prentice, and the edifying discourses of Master Tobias Mardyke and his wife Bridget; with other matters very profitable and entertaining.

What are the matters very profitable and entertaining? Is it profitable to go to Tom Robertson's "Ours"—bad enough in all conscience—and to borrow the groundwork of a whole act, including the roley-poley, which is replaced by pap; including the storm and the hail-shower, simulated by pelting rice from the flies?

Is it entertaining to treat us to an endless "spooning" scene between comic-relief parties of a most ancient pattern? Furthermore, is it good logic—good drama—to leave the half dead but "cleansed Gervase" to his fate, in order that the story may be clear for a reconciliation scene? And yet all that might have been forgiven if, after the meeting of Gervase and Joan, who

then thanked Providence for hearing her prayer, the curtain had fallen leaving a morsel to our imagination. But that was not to be; more explanations had to follow—discourse in which nobody took any interest, anxious as all were to get away. And so the play flickered out, and the audience, cold, cross, and irritated fought right loyally with boos and bravos over the verdict.

As I have said there was an excellent scene in the second act, and if Joan's father Mallory had expressed his doubt of God with less theatricality and more sincerity, it would have gripped the audience even more firmly than it did. There were also some pretty touches in the two acts and one in the third, when Joan refused the hand of Gervase's friend. Unfortunately it came in the wrong place, as by that time the evil reminiscences of Robertson had killed the interest in Parker.

"The Mayflower" is an invertebrate little play, sweet but weak, and the very quaintness of the language, which wavered between the form of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, tended to reveal that Mr. Parker's grip is not a strong one. His dialogue is pretty, flowery, ambitious, but it is never really beautiful.

To talk of characterisation in a play which is merely one of "entourage," and nowhere truly human, seems idle, but I cannot refrain from sounding a note of protest against the portrayal of the Hollander Hundius. He is not a Hollander at all. He is a comic-opera German, such as Mr. Fritz Rimma plays, or a farcical comedy Teuton, such as Mr. Ferdinand Gottschalk impersonates to perfection. Fancy a Hollander talking of "Mein Gott," of "ach," of "a schmall leetle house," of "Herrjee," and so on. It is ridiculous, and I feel impatient with the superficiality of an author who lays his plots in a foreign locality and makes caricatures of people of whom he knows nothing. Why introduce foreign accents at all if one does not know their particular flavour?

Mr. Kittredge, who played the Germanised Dutchman, did it exceedingly well. He knows the Teutonic intonations, and

makes the most of them. But it was spurious humour. Mr. McIntosh, who once gave such a fine performance of William III, might have taught him—and, for the matter of that, the author too—how a Hollander breaks English. The German sings his English in high-pitched tones, the Dutchman rasps it with guttural accentuation. Mr. Scott Buist, who played the lover, is a highly intelligent actor, and his Tesman in "Hedda Gabler" is still unforgotten. But he is not strong, heroic, or passionate—all of which was essential in the character of a dashing lord of romantic days. Mr. Bernard Gould was bluff and manly as Captain Poynings. It was not a good part, but the actor improved it, and indeed outshone the hero of the play. Miss Lena Ashwell was a picture of Joan in every sense of the word. Her simple, somewhat languid manner of speech is often fascinating, but she wants to give full scope to her emotions. The power is there, but it is too much kept under restraint. I would fain say she is afraid of giving it rein, lest her feelings run away with her. Miss Henrietta Watson is a very bright comedienne with an arch little manner of her own, and Miss Lizzie Scobie, as a bonnie landlady of Plymouth, was exactly the sort of engaging young widow who would tempt the Jack Tars ashore. Mr. Mark Kinghorne played the sanctimonious humbug of a Puritan on conventional, yet effective lines, and Mr. George Warde, though very old-fashioned, was not unimpressive in the one powerful scene of the play. With a somewhat strengthened cast, "The Mayflower" may bloom for a while on the Surrey side of the water and in the provinces, but it would be rash to transplant it to the more critical centre of West London. The third act dooms the play, and seeing how thin the whole work is, I fear that it is hopeless to attempt to mind it.

COMEDY: "A LADY OF QUALITY."

March 12, '99.

The first act had been strong and interesting, and, with reminiscences of the delightful novel living vividly in my mind, I anticipated a miracle, an acceptable adaptation of an exceptional book. But, alas! before we were half way through the piece, it was evident that we were doomed to disappointment.

It was a matter for sorrow, not for anger or severe censure. For whoever had read the book understood the circumstances. Here was a fine novel, a story full of dramatic intensity, a character of extraordinary fascination, a series of events, which held the reader spell-bound. It must make a powerful play. It must surely charm the playgoer as much as the reader. Thus, no doubt, reasoned the gifted authoress, Mrs. Hodgson Burnett. And then she set to work, and, as she was conscious that her talent lay in narrative and not in the crisp treatment which is imperative in stage-work, she joined forces with Mr. Stephen Townsend, an able craftsman and one who, as "Will Dennis," had shown that he is an actor of no mean rank. Their task was—prayer pass the word—to "bovrilise" the book, to compress into five chapters of dialogue the analysis, the characterisation, and also the style of the romance. And in the first act they succeeded to the full. Thus they drank and argued and swore, the gentry of the last century, thus the tom-boy would have joined the men in their bout, would have brusqued them and ruled them, until at the right moment she remembered that it was her girlhood's adieu, and that henceforth the breeches, the sword, and the oath would have to give way to the skirt, the corset, and the blush. But when all that was done,

and further on we had to be acquainted with the fact that tomboy Clorinda Wildairs had yielded to that wild fellow John Oxon, and that he had cut a lock from her raven black hair which anon he would use for blackmail and menace, we began to be tormented by the book, and those who had not read it grew bewildered. How had it all come about? Whence the hold of this man upon the woman? Is a bunch of hair conclusive evidence of a false step? Why, after her widowhood—for she had married an old nobleman and been freed a year later—should she fear lest John Oxon should tell tales to His Grace of Osmonde, to whom the lonesome heart went out in love and ardour? Fateful questions, all of them, which must arise, since much is to be elucidated and little is explained. And then comes the most ominous query of all, the point which dramatically makes or mars the play. Was it necessary, was it the indispensable climax, that Clorinda should refute John's hellish blackmail with blows of the loaded whip? If so, the scene would have shaken us to the marrow of our bones—if it was wanton, we would merely look upon it as sheer melodrama. Now in the book it was fairly warranted by facts, in the play it was not, and thus the bravura-scene, in which Clorinda clubs her betrayer and hides his corpse under the huge sofa, after which she receives her guests with a serene face, fails to thrill.

That is the vital fault of the play, and it is so lurid that all minor defects, such as the inordinately long reflections of the heroine, the stifling of the action in order to dwell on uninteresting details, the empty grandiloquence of nearly every character, are almost eclipsed. "A Lady of Quality" is, therefore, one of those plays which, in spite of its interesting milieu, its undefinable charm of conception, its evidence that the authors are of no common clay and wield the pen with ease and grace, will only live if it is acted with overwhelming force by the heroine, and with exquisite courtliness by her fellow-players. It is, in fine, an actor's, not an author's play.

There was no salvation in the acting. Mostly young folk of very little experience were employed, and if they tried their

best they accomplished little. Perhaps Mr. George Kenrick as Sir John Oxon, and Mr. Rawson Buckley (Lord Eldershaw), outshone the commonplace crowd, for they, at least, wore the kneebreeches and the sword with becoming ease, and seemed at home in their characters and the play's period. Miss Marie Linden, although at first more lachrymose than Anne's self-effacing little personality demanded, had moments of touching suavity. The rest—except one—were silenced or wasted on their parts.

There remains the heroine—the very axis of the play—Miss Eleanor Calhoun. To say that she failed would be unjust; to compliment her on a great success would be mere flattery. She strove for victory, and she won one half of the battle. For she is an actress of great intelligence, of much *savoir faire*, of a fine dramatic training. With such endowments she is evidently in the right place in plays of modern life, where conversation is more essential than fervid declamation, where passion is softened by choice words and gentle manners. But in a drama like "A Lady of Quality," intelligence, routine, and refinement alone are not sufficient. Great art is wanted, magnificent outbursts of feeling, intense power, electricity that ignites audience and players alike, and above all a personality of undisputed supremacy. Miss Calhoun does not command these unique gifts; she is interesting, winsome, well-mannered to a fault, but she neither grips nor masters her hearers. A Bernhardt, a Duse, a Sorma of all actresses in the world, could have done this, and thus have exalted the play. That Miss Calhoun saved it is greatly to her credit, and she deserves praise for her courageous effort.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY

March 19, '99.

"Well, if I were you," said I, "instead of announcing in the *Era* that I was 'resting'—a placid participle often hiding a tale of misery—I should seek an engagement in a theatre where a curtain-raiser is on the programme."

"No, no, no; not that! you might as well ask me to get buried alive," exclaimed my fair visitor, and as she spoke she shuddered as if an east wind of despair were chilling her to the bone. And she went on: "To play in a front-piece is to come down in one's profession; it is evidence that one is not wanted in the 'show' of the evening, that one is 'on the shelf', as it were. The play in most cases is no good, and the pay is no less wretched. The stalls and the dress-circle yawn in emptiness. The critics won't take any notice of you, or deal with your performance in a condescending, often a surly manner. Generally there is not a 'hand' in the house, and after a hundred nights or so, but for your weekly pittance, you are just as badly off as you were before."

I listened attentively to the indictment. For it was an experienced woman who spoke—an actress who possessed brains and other gifts that gave weight to her opinion.

At first I felt inclined to rejoin: "But what about 'Repentance'?" and then I thought better of it, remembering that the argument would not hold. Was not "Repentance" an error of a gifted writer, and its inept performance by the leading man one of those "half-bricks" which one would fain hurl at that Vanity Fair which is the despotism of actor-managers?

In this case exception would by no means confirm the rule ; for if Mrs. Craigie had not written "Repentance," and if she had not provided the masquerade of the friar for the manager of the St. James's Theatre, there would have been no one-act play to accompany "The Ambassador."

The actress had said : "The play in most cases is no good," and she spoke gospel-truth. We must go back I don't know how many dozens of months to remember one comedietta or miniature drama which was worth the footlights and the gas. All that is given at present before the piece of the evening at our best theatres is sorry stuff. It is all shoddy, and whoever forsakes the delights of the after-dinner weed for it is as ill-advised as the man who wastes a threepenny bit to purchase a purse with which a half sovereign is (said to be) given away.

It has not always been so. There were times when the one-act play was a distinct stepping-stone towards histrionic renown. In France Mme. Emile de Girardin, who wrote "*La Joie fait peur*," François Coppée with his "*Luthier de Crémone*," Theuriet with "*Jean Marie*," made their names by these trifles. In fact, the first-named lady has never done anything else which dwells in the memory of anyone on this side, and yet she is, wherever I have travelled, a famous woman. Germany, too, has a vast budget of one-act minor classics. I will refrain from cataloguing, but must just mention Ludwig Fulda, whose "*Unter Vier Augen*" revealed his dramatic instinct, while the Rosens and Mosers, in fine the whole school of older men who are still prominent graduated in this manner.

I could substantiate my case by enumerating other countries and their writers of one-act plays. But let us revert to England. Ten years or so ago Mr. Jerome K. Jerome came to the fore with his "*Barbara*" and "*Sunset*"; after that there was a period when the triple-bill flourished and produced some neat little works by writers, some of whom have since become full-blown dramatists. Later, again, Mr. and Mrs. Charrington ventured upon a quintuple bill which contained the names of such distinguished novelists as Mrs. W. K. Clifford and Mr. Thomas Hardy, besides three other well-known writers. The last-named experiment,

for various reasons, had but scant success, and the quintuple bill came to an untimely end.

But the fact remains that some of the cleverest minds in our literary world turned their attention to the drama, and, however timorously, tried their strength in a craft which was comparatively, or rather practically, new to them. If there had been encouragement; if, for instance, the untoward collapse of the management which ran the quintuple bill at Terry's had not terminated the career of Mr. Thomas Hardy's clever little play, the public would undoubtedly have developed a taste for short dramas, as it has been taught to patronise short stories. Moreover, following the example of Mr. Hardy, other first-rate penmen would have for the nonce devoted a little time to dramatic work.

But it was not to be, and the curtain-raiser has fallen upon evil days. Nobody wants to see it; nobody cares to write it; no rising actor is ambitious to play in it; no critic (unless he be an actor-manager's man) pays heed to it. It serves, like the vile *hors d'œuvres* in our small Italian restaurants, to while away the fidgety interval between our comfortably settling down and the first earnest item of the menu.

The one-act play deserves a better fate. Its usefulness is beyond dispute. What it can do for authors has been demonstrated to the full; and if only managers could see their way to reward it handsomely instead of starving it with a miserable ten shillings a night (the usual fee), while the main fare, however idiotic it may be, enjoys the princely payment of so much down and a large percentage of the gross receipts, its renaissance would be a matter of a very brief space of time.

But there is another direction in which the curtain-raiser may justify its claim to a comfortable existence. If the play be of some merit in characterisation and dialogue, it should prove an excellent touchstone of acting in these days of terrible overcrowding in the profession.

Suppose that, at present, a manager has belief in a young artist and wished to affiliate him to his company. He immediately allots him a part of some importance in the play

of the evening. The result is often utter failure, and for this reason the critics have to dismiss Mr. or Miss So-and-So with lukewarm praise, which is worse than damnation, or with strictures which may discourage the artist for ever. The responsibility of the discomfiture would be in such a case entirely the manager's. In his well-meaning (or when it concerns a beautiful woman, speculative) zeal, he overtaxed the strength of his *protégé*, and exposed him (or her) to peril. Now, a good curtain-raiser, no maudlin sentiment or Two Macs clownery, but a play written with the intention of compressing into a small compass a passage of life, grave or gay, would have been an excellent test of the aspirant's powers. For a passable curtain-raiser should be in the most concentrated form the replica of a play in several acts, with the one difference that the unity of time and the immediate logical sequence of events should be strictly observed. That in itself indicates that the one-act play must be acted, by no means as it is now done, in a slipshod fashion by raw and cheap recruits, but by actors endowed with intelligence and with a fund of comic or tragic power far more intense than is required in a more elaborate drama in which the climax is gradually evolved.

The test is a fair one, as ranting in a serious part of a short play or buffoonery in humorous characterisations are beyond reclamation. The one-act play makes no allowance for dissonants; its very shortness demands perfect harmony of tone and atmosphere.

What should be done to reinstate the curtain-raiser in its former position is obvious. It must no longer be scamped. It must be considered as a useful, not as a superfluous part of the programme. It must be properly paid for, so that authors, and not mere hacks, may be induced to devote their energies to it. It should be played by actors who have a name at stake, instead of nonentities who would do anything for 30s. a week, or the members of the company who are mere ballast in the main play, and are expected to do extra work to justify their salaries.

But that is not all : a forfeited reputation can only be reconquered by extraordinary efforts. Therefore, when the play of the evening is not long enough to fill the customary three hours, and a good miniature drama is available, the usual order of the programme should be reversed, as was customary in former days. If Mr. Alexander announces that henceforth "The Ambassador" shall be played first and the one-act "Repentance" round off the performance, there is no reason why other theatres should not follow suit. Leaving the merits of "Repentance" out of the question, the principle is a good one. If it becomes known that the one act play will have a fair audience and a fair hearing, the quality of play and acting alike will improve ; and, in course of time, the curtain-raiser will cease to be looked upon with contempt.

THE REJUVENESCENCE OF IRVING

March 26, '99.

It came as a rude shock, some months ago, the message that Sir Henry Irving would no longer occupy the Lyceum. It heralded a sad ending to a vital chapter of our dramatic history. The Lyceum was, in a sense, the National theatre of the English world—the Theatre Français of London. The Lyceum was the embodiment of all that is refined, sumptuous and noble in English histrionic art. It was scarcely progressive, perhaps old-fashioned in its methods, but “noblesse oblige” was writ large over its porch, and inside there reigned, since Irving was its ruler, faultless decorum wedded to impressive respect of tradition. Sir Henry Irving himself united in his personality all the gifts which are becoming to the leader of a great profession. He was the master, and never forgot the dignity of his position. He ruled with tact and with taste, and if he never failed to impress upon all, on both sides of the footlights, that he was the chief, his domination was ever softened by exquisite courtliness and suavity of manner. Hence his dress-rehearsals were well nigh as perfect as the next night’s public representation. Here no nervousness, no overstrained and vainglorious mummer striving to concentrate all the lights and effects upon himself, thrusting everybody else into the shade, storming, cavilling, aye, swearing at the lesser fry; here nothing unseemly; nothing uncertain; nothing but perfect order, discipline, and calmness.

First nights at the Lyceum were something more than mere theatrical novelties. Their importance was second only to

great political events. All London awaited them with keen interest; countless pens were ready to chronicle the history of the evening; the cables spread the news of the trial and the verdict across the oceans, and the next day millions would eagerly devour and discuss the reports on the play and the players. The end seemed untimely. Irving had lost none of his vigour. His influence and his reputation were unimpaired. He had commissioned the most skilful of modern dramatists, Victorien Sardou, to embody the character of Robespierre in a play, and on all sides the choice was deemed felicitous. For Irving is the one man on our stage who could realise that great historical figure.

How was it, then, that on the very eve of a new triumph the great manager threatened to retire from the struggle? Rumour had plenty to say on the subject—for rumour is a talkative vixen, and her tongue is as poisonous as it is glib. Nor does it behove the critic to examine private reasons and idle gossip. Publicly we would only surmise that the unfavourable result of Sir Henry's two latest ventures discouraged him and kindled the desire to seek relief from managerial cares and worries. In a sense the crisis is not to be deplored. Art and commerce are an ill-matched couple. The former must necessarily be henpecked by the latter, and in the uneven wrestling there lurks the danger that not art alone, but the artist too will go to the wall. Therefore, when regret for Sir Henry's probable retirement had died off, and calm speculation on the future had taken its place, hope arose that ways and means would be found to retain Irving in his exalted position, yet freed from the anxieties of business, and to allow him to devote his genius and his time wholly to the artistic side of his calling. After a while hope became reality; the joint-stock system came to the rescue, and the Lyceum, Limited, appealed successfully to the public.

There may be some who have witnessed this development with scant approval. For Irving is no longer the absolute sovereign of the Lyceum. He is the dramatic adviser of his board of directors. The manager in command is a man whose

name, however well it may sound in some quarters, seems to erect a barrier against all progress, a man whose record and ambitions as a dramatist do not warrant the hope that the gates of the Lyceum, too long closed, will be readily opened to the tide of modern literature. Moreover, Sir Henry will probably not rule more than one hundred days a year at the Lyceum, and of his earnings on tour a large percentage will go to swell the dividends of the shareholders.

All this is somewhat painful at the first glance, and time alone can tell whether it will work satisfactorily and enhance the fame of the Lyceum and its most distinguished manager.

But from a merely artistic point of view the new arrangement may prove a godsend. Irving is maintained at the head of his profession, which he has exalted as no other man has before him. He will steer in clear waters; money will no longer be an object, and his grandiose productions will, except for the care for artistic achievement, cause him no preoccupation. If he should encounter failures, which is inevitable in a world of chance, there will be ample supplies with which to rally and to make new efforts. If he should triumph, as a man of his genius and acumen is bound to do in the long run, the laurels will be his, and greater than ever will his name figure in the history of our stage.

One word more. It is my firm belief that the coming era at the Lyceum, which I venture to call the Rejuvenescence of Irving, will exercise a great influence on his reputation as an actor. He will now be able to select his parts with more repose, with greater regard to their fitness for his gifts. And the result will be that he will conquer many who are slow to recognise his greatness; far too often in the past has one heard strictures on his acting coupled with eulogies of other actor-managers, who, to say nothing of genius, lag miles behind him in talent and intelligence. His detractors were principally people who rarely went to the Lyceum, or those who only saw our great actor in his creations of Romeo, of Hamlet, of Benedick, parts he felt bound to perform in order to maintain the motto of his house and the standard of the first theatre in the

English world. They only saw Irving at his worst, and under the yoke of personal peculiarities; his grandeur in Louis XI., his humour in Robert Macaire, his magnificent dignity in Becket and Richelieu, all that was unknown to them, for Irving often changed his programmes, and his best known parts were by no means his best. In the future, I believe, unhampered by the desire of establishing a record of versatility, and (it is hoped) by the necessity of dividing honours with Miss Ellen Terry by the selection of plays particularly suited to her, Sir Henry will be able to neglect plays which provide him with no fitting part. "Robespierre," about which the preliminary accounts are most promising, is a step in the right direction; and, no doubt, in every subsequent production Sir Henry and his new advisers will above all study in how far the main character is consistent with the powers, the temperament, and the age of the actor.

"THE GAY LORD QUEX"

April 9. '99.

When the curtain fell and the joyful house had done homage to the author, Mr. John Hare was called upon to speak. And in the simple words that sprang from his lips, he was the spokesman of us all, for he proclaimed Pinero: A master of his craft.

He is the master builder of our stage. We have often felt and said it, in spite of the jibes of the envious; and now the fact has been proved to the very hilt, for he has given us a play that would shine in the Ville Lumière, which is the fountain-head of modern wit and ingenuity.

This is no jest—no exaggeration. "The Gay Lord Quex" is cleverer than the cleverest comedy Sardou has ever written, it is as brilliant, and as full of observation as the best of Dounay and Lavedan. But it is much deeper; it is more human; it is—though very daring—never vulgar.

I hate to tell the story. I feel that it is a cruel injustice to the author, who kindly lent me the book in order that I should not be in the rear-guard; but I read no more than five pages, and then I laid it aside, for I would not spoil the delights of the representation which I tasted in the perusal of the opening scenes.

But in this case something must be told about the plot, for it is a complicated play, and although I would much prefer that my readers should skip my outline and go and see for themselves, here is the skeleton.

In the first act we have an attractive picture of a Bond-street

manicuring establishment, also of its sprightly proprietor, Sophy Fullgarney.

Amongst her *clientèle* is Sir Chichester Fayne and the Marquis of Quex, who have an unenviable—but envied—reputation of men about town. Lord Quex, however, has of late sought to whitewash his somewhat weatherworn character in view of his approaching marriage with Muriel Eden. Unfortunately for Lord Quex no one but his devoted aunt, Lady Owbridge, his *fiancée*, and her sister-in-law, believes in the whitewash, and Sophy Fullgarney least of all.

Miss Eden herself is in love with a young officer, Captain Bantling, but has been persuaded into her engagement by her sister-in-law.

But Sophy Fullgarney is devoted to Muriel—she is her foster-sister—and is determined to do all in her power to prevent Muriel's marriage with the wicked Lord Quex.

To this end she connives at the lover's meetings in her house, and fans Muriel's dislike of her *fiancé*, whom we know from his conversation with a friend to be honestly in love with her.

Sophy, having been introduced to Lady Owbridge as Muriel's foster-sister, is invited to spend a day at Fauney Court, Lady Owbridge's seat near Richmond, where the Edens and Lord Quex are among her house party. The second act takes us to the garden of Fauney Court, where we find, not only Sophy, but her "young man," Frank Pallia, a professional palmist, known as Valma, who has been set by Sophy to observe the doings of Lord Quex.

Having taken all this trouble, she is not unnaturally indignant when Muriel confesses to a growing interest in her *fiancée*, and a positive relief in Captain Bantling's departure for China.

Lord Quex's new-found virtue triumphs over Sophy's suspicions, until by chance she overhears a conversation between him and the Duchess of Stood, one of his many former flames, with whom he reluctantly consents to a rendez-vous that night. Fortunately for Sophy's plans the Duchess's maid is taken ill, and Sophy's offer to undertake her duties is gladly accepted.

' Now comes the great scene in the third act, where Sophy is discovered by Lord Quex and the Duchess listening at the keyhole of her Grace's boudoir. The latent good in the Marquis's character under these trying circumstances is shown in masterly style. Anxious above everything to save the Duchess's good name, he sends her from the room and locks Sophy in with himself. Sophy is scornful of his threats until the thought of her position in the eyes of her own *fancé*, makes her promise eternal ignorance of the night's proceeding as the price of her release.

Having signed the guarantee of her silence, Sophy is overcome at the meanness of securing her own happiness at the price of her foster sister's, and begins ringing the bell to arouse the servants. Lord Quex, touched by such disinterested devotion, releases her unconditionally, but, Sophy, touched in her turn, promises to be silent.

' After this powerful act, the last one, which is again in Miss Fullgarney's establishment, comes somewhat tamely, though the interest is sustained by the temporary yielding of Muriel to Captain Bantling. But this time, Sophy, who has quite changed her opinion of Lord Quex, intervenes, and Muriel, surprises Bantling kissing her sly friend as a reward for the kind services she has rendered him. Now the tables are turned with a vengeance. The captain slinks away in disgrace, and the play ends with the pleasing certainty that the announcement of the marriage of Miss Muriel Eden and the Marquis of Quex will shortly be set forth with due solemnity in the *Morning Post*.

The charms of this work are many. It bristles with humour. It is written with fabulous fluency, and its style glows with polish and sparkles with wit. In constitution it is highly complicated, but the author never loses control of his maze of incidents, nor of the individuality of his characters. It is long, yes; but the length is a merit, and soon, when the actors have learned to double the rapidity of their delivery, every scene, every situation, many as they are, will make its mark.

The root of the comedy's success lies in the author's knowledge of the feminine character. No man—says an old philosopher—can fathom the depth of a woman's heart; but Pinero, I venture to suggest, is nearer to the solution of that problem than any other playwright in England. His male characters may not always be true to life—in fact, Lord Quex is not quite a live man, but a product of fiction—but his women are amazingly womanly. It is not I who say that, but I have it from women who have studied Pinero's work as closely as any critic.

With the exception of Miss Fortescue, who struggled hard with a part in which Rejane alone could have reached perfection, all the principal actors were eminently successful. The palm of the evening fell to Miss Irene Vanbrugh, who will henceforth rank as one of our best comediennes. Her part was long and full of difficulties, but she surmounted all, and was the mainstay of the play. Messrs. Hare, father and son, gave flawless portrayals of middle-aged *viveurs*, and Miss Fanny Coleman, as an old-fashioned society lady, was excellent in her early Victorian manner. On a future occasion when time is less pressing, I shall deal with the minor characters. Let them take my assurance at this late hour that every one of them did his duty to the author.

And so Mr. Pinero triumphed all along the line; his play was voted one of his best, by some his very best; his actors were with him in the car; and, lastly, "The Gay Lord Quex" was a triumph over the Philistines, for no one objected to its bold conceit. It is a happy omen.

“THE TYRANNY OF TEARS”

April 9. '99.

Let me apply the crucial test to this matter, and suppose—I emphasise suppose—the case were mine. I am married; my wife is a dear little darling of a toy; she is amorous to a superlative degree, and kisses and caresses are to her what sunshine is to the flower. She is also somewhat lachrymose, as amorous wives often are; the fountains are ever ready to play, and when they do I must willy-nilly melt like sugar in the teacup. For oh! the tyranny of wifely tears! Hence my liberty is somewhat curtailed—no clubs, no men’s dinners, no shooting parties, nothing but eternal marital bliss in strict accordance with the vows of the marriage service. Yet I am no mere mannikin, and while submitting I maintain my dignity, and, above all, my common sense, and so I am very contented in the love-bower which is my home.

I also have a lady typist who is pretty and takes down the novels and articles while I dictate. It is perhaps not very wise to have a pretty lady typist in the house, any more than it was wise of the Trojans to let the horse in; but there she is, and for a while, unless my wife’s barometer marks “rain,” ours is a happy little home.

But one day when, with the delightful picture of „Enfin seuls” before my eyes, I settle down to cosiness, my wife suddenly bursts into the room with the exclamation:

“Dear, you must dismiss that type-writer instantly!”

„Why, darling?” I retort in blank bewilderment.

“I can’t tell you!”

"But, dearest, there surely must be a reason, and since we are reasonable beings, you can have no objection to telling me."

"I won't tell you!"—(a sniff).

"Then the typewriter must stay. I cannot discharge a woman who does her duty simply because you wish me to do so

"She must leave the house!" (Tears.)

The situation becomes somewhat serious. Apparently something has happened. I begin to conjecture. Rudeness? Trouble? (you know what I mean) perhaps dishonesty—but no, no, no, I dare not think of it.

Meanwhile torrents rush down my wife's lovely face. And now I must show myself a man and get at the truth without making a scene.

Remember that my wife is amorous, and that with such a temperament there is but one policy that will conquer her—the policy of the waist-coaxing arm and of the caressing lip. So with gentle pressure and persuasion I overcome her reserve, and find that the reason of her sorrow is a mere nothing. Fancy, the typewriter had only kissed my photograph in filial or literary admiration!—and after a good lecture to the indiscreet young lady, our little world continues to revolve peacefully on its axis.

Such would be the solution among normal people, but Mr. Haddon Chambers, in his attractive and ingenious little play, turns the little breeze into a furious gale, which ends in the wife's going away to her papa (soon to return), a gay old bird who is mightily embarrassed with this burden.

Now Mr. Chambers will of course rejoin: "I am a playwright, I have to compose a plot and build up a mountain, albeit from a molehill, and if I had let my people act rationally, there would have been at most two acts instead of four."

Quite so, Mr. Chambers, and it is there that the shoe pinches, although generally the fit is perfect. At least one of your principal characters is ill-balanced, not the wife, for she is a consistent tear-spiller, and a little silly to the end; but your man, the fine novelist, the man of the world, the man of lofty

talk and exalted ideas, is he not a weakling for letting his wife go? And is not his entire demeanour inconsistent throughout the play? I know that the great difficulty of a dramatist is to compress into the frame of a few acts a portrait which is finished and life-like in all its shades, but to accomplish this is the great secret of the art of playwriting. Therefore, from the moment the conflict between man and wife begins, we leave the highroad of probability and branch off to the maze and tangles of romancing, and, instead of believing what the writer puts before us, we must constantly make allowances for his deviation from the logic of life. This is all the more regrettable since the collateral characters of the play are drawn with firmness and consistency; and because, too, with the exception of a few needless expansions in the third act, the story is always interesting.

The typewriter is an excellent creation. This girl, number thirteen in a parson's family, where the joint of Sunday finishes its marvellous career of culinary metamorphoses, with a stew on Saturday, is the incarnation of the cool, phlegmatic, unemotional English young person, who is the outcome of national fecundity. Her life promises to be a plodding one, and matters-of-fact are its only variety. Fortunately, her very primness attracts a middle-aged bachelor who is in every respect well-mated to her, and so these two people, the impecunious chilly maiden and the level-headed independent man, make up their minds to embark together in the boat of matrimony. Their conversation, in which they arrive at an understanding, is unique in its modernity; all romance is thrown overboard, and they reason about the one great question of life as calmly as people do in France, when, thanks to the professional matchmaker, after three dinner parties the young people are left alone (yet observed) to clench the bargain. The scene is naturally written, and its grip on our interest is continuous: a man who can do it so well as Mr. Chambers is not only a born dramatist, but also a humorous observer of the first water. And that is not the only merit of this work, which leaves all that Mr. Chambers

has hitherto written far behind it; throughout it is written with a refined pen and the very simplicity of the means by which the author maintains the tension of the story and the charm of its atmosphere, should class "The Tyranny of Tears" among the plays that deserve a long life and a longer remembrance.

The success is all the more remarkable, since the main character, played by Miss Mary Moore, was not realised at all by the actress; she simply cannot do such fine and subtle work, and that is about all that needs to be said about it.

Mr. Charles Wyndham, who played the husband, is always fascinating, because his personality is interesting and his knowledge of his *métier* immense. But maturity begins to tell, and he seems to be acquiring a habit of drawling his speeches, which hampers the action and makes for monotony. He tried to be as youthful as he could, but, like Delauny in his latter days at the Français, the *jeune premier* did not really succeed in suppressing the *père noble*. His finest scenes were those in which he addressed the typewriter in a paternal way, or joked with his friend during his temporary separation from his wife. That was comedy acting to perfection. Miss Maud Millett has never been so well suited as with the part of the typewriter. She triumphs by what in other impersonations are her shortcomings. This character demanded no emotion, no warmth, no tenderness; placidness and a tinge of humour was all that was called for, and Miss Millett displayed it with innate sincerity. Mr. Kerr, who always scores in characters of bluntness and stolidity, was in excellent form—of acting I mean—for one of these days, when there is more space to discuss these things, it will be useful to give him some hints as to the use and abuse of the hat, and generally the etiquette to be observed in the drawing-room. It is strange that these matters of form are entirely disregarded by our stage-managers. Abroad a great deal of attention is rightly given to them. The old colonel of Mr. Alfred Bishop, though a poor part, was most original; everything this clever actor does is distinguished by finish and careful observation.

"The Tyranny of Tears" was graciously received, although it aroused no enthusiasm, as it deserved. But then it was produced at the Criterion, and there many a play has suffered from the tyranny of the leading lady, traditional on our modern stage. It is a pity, but it is inevitable, and therein lies the author's consolation.

"CARNAC SAHIB"

Her Majesty's.

April 16. '99.

The dramatist was routed, and the actors, loyal to the last, were unable to stave off defeat.

If it were a question of fixing responsibilities, I should unhesitatingly condemn that modern pest, the preliminary paragraphist who gives the interest away and wantonly fosters exalted expectations.

Next, Mr. Jones would be to blame, for his work bears traces of hot haste; of insufficient knowledge of his subject; and, above all, of retrogression towards lurid melodrama.

Lastly, some would censure Mr. Beerbohm Tree for his lack of acumen in the selection of the play. But with him I deeply sympathise, for no man, unless he be a Titan in frame and in brain, can bear four such tremendous burdens as management, star-acting, stage-direction, and, particularly, the judgment of plays. And if I, as one who is a well-wisher of Mr. Tree, in spite of past feuds, may offer a friendly suggestion, I would beseech him to strengthen his elbow as in the days past with the help of a competent literary adviser. That is the only way to avoid such unfortunate mistakes as have been too frequent from the moment Mr. Tree left the ideal Haymarket Theatre and opened the splendid gulf which is Her Majesty's with "The Seats of the Mighty."

For that "Carnac Sahib" is a huge mistake, Mr. Jones' warmest admirers, to whom I belong, and Mr. Tree's most fervent followers, cannot possibly deny. A single glance at the book

presented to all the critics was sufficient to establish that fact. "Carnac Sahib" is a roughly hewn melodrama, that would neither grace the boards of the Adelphi nor stand comparison with the worst production of Drury-lane. In workmanship, in style, in every sense, from conception to the smallest details of execution, it is not worthy of the gifted writer who gave us "Judah," "The Crusaders," "The Liars," and other works too numerous to name. True, it was a splendid spectacle, but beautiful frames do not make artistic canvasses, and bejewelled palaces will not rouse our interest when the tedium of the action weighs our eyelids down like lead. And if tedium were the only fault! But there is a graver one. I, personally, know nothing about Indian life, except from books and hearsay—like Mr. Jones—but I know enough about our army to declare that such officers as Carnac and Syrett do not exist, have never existed; and that, except for a few scant touches of local colour, the story might as well have happened in the darkest African settlement, or in a rebellious republic of South America.

Yet this was to be a play of real Indian life, the kind of play for which we have been waiting all these years, instead of which it is a poor revival of all the noisy military show-pieces which used to please the patrons of Sanger's in the eighties. And those were better, for in none of them did we ever see a pair of British officers forsaking or transgressing their duties for a fascinating grass-widow (I withhold the world I should employ); nor a colonel employing the services of a native assassin to remove his rival. This is the pivot of the plot, and if it did not repel me I would quote chapter and verse relating to this unclean business. Of course the bitter pill is coated. There is noise, there is parading with drum and fife, there is fight and heroism, there is the traditional little maiden of divine virginity who will whitewash the hero with her devotion and her love. But that is all as much tinsel as the manoeuvres of the crowd, the garish bazaar, and the splendid ruins of the Hindoo temple or the Jewelled Palace of Fyzapore. The central point is that two of our officers disgraced themselves and their

calling for as worthless a woman as ever crossed the path of men, and therewith sympathy vanishes, and the play falls.

Closer examination of side questions is unnecessary; it would be sheer waste of time to ask by what right the temptress lingers about the bungalow of the officers; what sort of discipline allowed a soldier to disobey his superior officer with the remark that he should wait a moment (until he had brought the lady back to her companions); to ask many other questions which would drive superfluous nails into the coffin. Rather than split hairs, I would praise Mr. Jones for the two powerful scenes in the play, i.e. the end of the second act, which is intense melodrama, and the one in the third act between Carnac and Syrett after the attempt to murder, which was pathetic and powerfully written. But this was not enough to save the play.

It was a hopeless struggle, and the mightiest efforts of the actors could achieve no more than defer the crash to the end. Without a Tree and a Waller, working hand in hand to hold the piece together; without Eva Moore, to shed a little ray of sunshine into the dulness; without the clever touches of characterisation of Miss Vynor as an ayah, Mr. Mansfield as a native spy, Mr. Norman McKinnel, the Rajah, Mr. Beveridge and Mr. Herbert Ross (in a disagreeable part of a clergyman with irreverential tendencies), without this distinguished and capable cast, the public would have lost their patience long before the last act. Mr. Tree and Mr. Waller, both as intense and as powerful as the dialogue would allow them to be, deserve much praise for their plucky perseverance, all the more as they had to deal with a heroine who played rather against than with them. The truth is that Mrs. Brown Potter was weak. She wore gorgeous dresses, not all beautiful; she ogled and eyed behind and across the footlights, as if to capture us with her fascination; she spoke a language which was neither English nor American, but simply affected; it was not acting, it was posing. It may be in place in the drawing-room, but on the stage it is not. Yet the whole play should have drawn its inspiration from Mrs. Brown-Potter.

And to think that Marion Terry, that Mrs. Campbell, and Mrs. Tree herself could have been entrusted with the part !.

A few remarks in conclusion to you, friends of our drama in the gallery and also in the pit, on whose mood and appreciation so much depends. I am sure you will not take it amiss from one who, whenever your rights have been curtailed or your privileges assailed, has ever been your warmest supporter. I want to ask you : Was it generous, was it chivalrous, was it humane to behave as you did on the first night of "Carnac Sahib" ? Recall the situation The play had displeased you. You paid a tribute to the actors, which was strongly mixed with sounds of condemnation ; that in itself was enough, it spelt great financial loss to the manager and could not fail to reach the ears of the crestfallen author. Yet, instead of going away after this demonstration, you stayed on and began a cruel work. You persisted in calling the author, who, rightly abashed, declined to appear. Again the curtain rose, and as your wish was not fulfilled, you pelted the absent Mr. Jones with sounds of execration, you showered them upon Mr. Tree and his company, who had worked so vainly, yet so hard. And even that was not enough—you were not content with the conviction that yonder behind the scenes there reigned grief and heartburn, you proceeded to howl for the author until, there being nothing else to save, the orchestra played "God Save the Queen," and you grew tired of the game.

Once more I ask : Is it chivalrous—is it English ?

Surely, everyone of you has endured the sore feeling of failure in your lives—you who are workers have one and all done well-intentioned labours which failed to please your masters. You know, therefore, what it means ; you are able to realise how terrible it must be to suffer not failure alone, but derision into the bargain. Yet, good-natured and just as you usually are, you would rub salt into the author's wound, although his non-appearance signified acknowledgement of his failure.

Allow me to say that such conduct is indecorous, and to express the wish that you may, after considering my words,

break with this ugly manner, which in daily life you would be the first to condemn.

For do not forget that theatrical display, resplendent and glorious as it appears on the surface, hides many a misery, and that under the strain of a first night the strongest heart is apt to sink, when the agonies of failure, of great loss, of adverse criticism are intensified by the cruel torture of public and prolonged execration.

"ROBESPIERRE"

April 16. '99.

There is great rejoicing in the theatrical world, for Sir Henry has come back to the old home, and a brilliant success has inaugurated the new chapter of his illustrious career. Such evenings as that of yesterday are unforgettable; they are rare even in the lives of great actors; they have the deep meaning that the popularity of real genius is no ephemeral thing, that a great artist, by the grace of the Muses, is as dear to the public as their very household gods.

And it was a glorious return. The play was intensely interesting; the display was unsurpassed in grandeur; above all, the actor appeared younger, stronger, and more brilliant than for many days past.

That all London will rush to see Irving in "Robespierre" and to do homage to the master of the dramatic profession is a foregone conclusion. But it is equally sure that the play will travel across the globe, for it has all the characteristics of cosmopolitanism. Sardou knows full well what pleases the world, and what pleases the world is ever sure to please London, the city of all tastes.

Therefore in writing this piece the grand old dramatist of France, the accomplished student of his country's history, has not deemed it necessary to adhere strictly to the text-books of Michelet or Duruy, he has not drawn a picture of the "incorruptible" such as he was, but he has humanised him, made him a fine melodramatic hero with something more than gifts of the tongue. In fact, Sardou has slipped a heart into the

man who sent more victims to the guillotine than all his fellow-rulers. He has endowed him with paternal affection; with undying devotion to the woman who once yielded to him; with quiet simplicity in his inner life, and with a conscience of great sensitiveness. The darker sides of the character are, however, nowise forgotten; his towering ambition, his fanaticism, his cunning and his cruelty, it is all there. Yet in the main Sardou's Robespierre is a sympathetic personality, because he does not appear to be innately bad, but seems drawn into evil by the maelstrom that engulfed in those terrible days the whole French nation.

In an interesting letter to a contemporary, Mr. Herman Merivale has declared that Robespierre enjoyed the reputation of absolute chastity, and that the existence of the love-child must have been a myth. That may be, although immaculate youth is a thing unheard of in France, and a liaison in that country is by no means considered a thing unchaste. But in moulding the great historical character for stage purposes, Sardou was undoubtedly judicious in introducing the son, for in his attitude towards the father, who is a stranger to him, lies the root of the drama. Robespierre, as he lives in history, was a character unfit for the stage, his loveless, fanatic, blood-thirsty existence afforded no dramatic possibilities, but the "voix du sang" opened up possibilities of a tragic conflict; and as Sardou has treated his theme, the perversion of history is amply compensated for by the deep interest engendered by the introduction of the mother and the child.

In the Greek drama the theme has been dealt with many a time, and in the dramatic poetry of France, from Corneille down to Coppée, the situation of the exalted father, whose son in his bitterest foe, is of frequent occurrence. Melodramatists also have displayed a great predilection for this problem, which is apt to thrill the spectator.

But Sardou, who is neither poet nor melodramatist in the ordinary sense of the word, has handled the conflict with infinite dexterity, has adorned it with all the illustrative possibilities the stage can afford. It is no mere question of the deliverance

of the two Royalists, mother and son, who have been cast into prison by the orders of the almighty, yet much envied and suspected, Director of State. That is merely the thread to hold the five acts together. The real object of the dramatist was to show, somewhat idealised, the inner life of the man who governed the Convention and France, and to draw a vivid picture of that blood-stained period when the God of religion had to give way to the heresy of the Supreme Being; when all the best-born were huddled together like beasts in prison; when tumbril after tumbril carried the innocent to the guillotine; when the people, maddened by licentious freedom, inebriated with the sight of Royalist blood, ruled the country, and their leaders—everything except their own passions.

And in drawing this picture Sardou has surpassed himself; since "Julius Cæsar," to which the pageant bears affinity, no such magnificent spectacle as the "Fête of the Supreme Being" has been seen on the stage; and the Meeting of the National Convention, in which Robespierre is knocked from his pedestal and seeks refuge in an idle attempt at suicide, is a tumultuous revival of the days of terror, such as only a master of stage-craft could devise.

It is futile to describe things as these, which everyone can see with his own eyes, and where the painting in words can but be a pale shadow of the picture. The impression alone can be rendered, and that is crystallised in the one word—overwhelming. Having said this, a great compliment is paid to the writer, who has minutely detailed every point in his manuscript, and to Mr. Laurence Irving, who is not only the author of a flawless and wonderfully terse translation, but, as I hear, the organiser of the entire production. If this be correct, let me hail him as one of the most competent, most artistic stage-managers of his time.

To say that "Robespierre" ranks high as a work of art would be flattery. It is great in craft, not in literature nor in balance. Upon Robespierre are concentrated the creative powers of the author; he alone arrests our attention; even in the great scene

in which he confronts his son who had just before attempted his life, and again in the tragic scene, when in the dead of night, within the gates of prison, he has the vision of all the innocent martyrs whom he has sent to be guillotined. This scene, which is evidently the result of Sardou's well-known spiritualistic proclivities, fringes the ridiculous, but with Henry Irving, more impressive than ever, depicting the agonies of an aching soul, it is profoundly tragic, it is the materialisation of psychical torture.

The other characters are somewhat niggardly treated; the mother of Robespierre's son, tenderly but not very enthusiastically acted by Miss Ellen Terry, has scant opportunities to come to the fore; nor has the son—a part of silent eloquence and poses. Mr. Kyrle Bellew excelled in both, and whenever he had a moment in which to unload the burden of his soul, he did it with justifiable vehemence. These were the only parts worthy of the name; the others were but skeletons, and though both Mr. Laurence Irving and Mr. Charles Calvert had chances for oratorical display in the scene of the Convention, of which they availed themselves with intense vigour and in convincing accents, it must be said that the dialogue of all the minor characters was spasmodic. This unequal distribution of the material of the play is undoubtedly its gravest fault; yet what a magician is Sardou, that he succeeds in uniting all these fragments so neatly that at the first glance the harmony of the picture is complete, and that for a while we are entirely captivated by the spell of his wand.

While criticising the play and endeavouring to fix its position, which is between melodrama and drama proper, I have referred to the actors, and there remains nothing more to be said except about Sir Henry Irving and Miss Ellen Terry. I would fain leave Miss Terry out of the question, as her memory was vacillating and almost endangered the initial scene of the first act and the commencement of the fourth. Fortunately Sir Henry was alive to all untoward events, and covered the tribulations of Miss Terry with his perfect routine. Still, we have not seen these scenes yet in their proper form, and it

is most likely that later on they will prove powerful levers to the first act, which is as clearly cut in its exposition as a cameo, and to the fourth, which seemed somewhat tame.

Sir Henry himself was throughout at his best. His voice was clear, his articulation distinct, and his bearing as elastic as if he had been granted a fresh lease of life. As usual, he had his episodes of greatness, as in the second act, when he harangued the crowd; in the third, when a mere flash in his eyes betrayed that Robespierre had recognised his son; in the last when delivering his curfew-speech in the Convention he had to rally the faithful round his ragged banner.

But Irving's best piece of acting was the speech before the curtain, after volleys of cheers which constrained him to move for himself and his company a vote of thanks.

He said little, but in its brevity and its pathos it must have sprung right from his heart. And when in his modest peroration he said: "I hope that the spirit of our old relations will live in this theatre," the overflowing house echoed his words in accents of indubitable cordiality.

MORE ABOUT "THE GAY LORD QUEX"

April 23. '99.

The best proof of the quality of a book or play is its capacity of bearing renewed study. For both are not unlike acquaintances in daily life. We may be captivated by the charm of a first meeting, yet the second and the following are, in most cases, decisive of our future relations. Of course, there is such a thing as love at first sight; yet it is rare, and often its ardour is not lasting; the rule is, the better you know and fathom, the better you will love. The case of "The Gay Lord Quex" was one of immediate captivation, and the reasons for it were several. We playgoers all revere Pinero; we are prejudiced in his favour by the record of his past work, and by the modesty and amiability of the man. Moreover, the play was brilliant, and full of those lightning touches of dialogue and "business" which are the priceless gifts of the born dramatist. Finally, the acting was of rare perfection. All of which are prepossessions that cannot fail to carry away the naturally enthusiastic crowd of firstnighters.

But enthusiasm is no guarantee of a lasting impression. Plays that have been hailed at their birth have failed in their earliest days, carefully reared as they were by eulogism and sumptuous advertisement, for they had no vital force, merely ephemeral charms. Not so with "The Gay Lord Quex": it is a play that will live.

I have not come lightly to this conclusion. I have seen the play. I have read it—and many a scene over and over again. I have, after allowing my first excitement to cool down, listened

to it once more; and now that every act—nearly every line—is as familiar to me as if I had been the author's secretary or his stage-manager, I must honestly declare that, when I see it performed, it holds me with all the power of a first impression,

I will try to explain, yet without irksome details, for now the story is common property and the play is discussed by every one, even by clerics who have never seen it.

The story, I must tell you, is least of all any concern of mine. It is not a new story—it may not even be a good one. I do not crave for fretwork plots and for engrossing situations, which are often the sole excuse for the existence of a play. I care for characters, for dashes here and dots there that denote genius, and I am deeply interested in the ethics of a work

' Let us deal with the last point. The play has been denounced as immoral because the Duchess of Strood assigns Quex to her bedroom for a final adieu in a peignoir, and with champagne, Felix Poubelle, Carte d'Or, and cigarettes of the Argyropoulos brand. A terrible thing that—a Duchess wanting to don "something loose," and to obtain by stealth a double pint of nectar in order to play Delilah to a recalcitrant Samson. And if the occurrence had been disgraced by coarse speech, such as you find in a French farce, I should have been the first to condemn it. For cynical immorality—viz. the wanton thing that will make people laugh—is unfit to be heard by respectable ears. But there is nothing cynical in the attitude. It is only the last effort of a passionate woman, married to a wreck of seventy, to reconquer the caresses of one to whom for a long time she was devoted, body and soul. Her proceedings may not be the thing to be represented before maidens and prudes. They may not be comprehended by the population of Suburbia, but minds of a wider horizon will, while talking of "shocking," acknowledge their tragic veracity. If fault must be found, it rests not with the Duchess, who is the prey of her passions, but with Quex, who, reformed, engaged though he was, had not sufficient strength of character to deny a last morsel of satisfaction to his former

mistress. Yet Quex (the author might say) was a man—and men are frail vessels. But granted for a moment that the beginning of the third act was immoral in plan, can anyone deny that the author has skilfully drawn the line before what was risky became indecent? Is it not true that the man from the first was proof against all temptation, and that, after the indiscretion of coming to the rendez-vous, he did everything in his power to safeguard the reputation of the amorous Duchess? Some will, this notwithstanding, persist in denouncing the scene, but doing that is narrowing down the drama to namby-pambyism, and proscribing all that passes the limits of superficial characterisation—or, in other words, all that moves the inner man beyond rhetorical effusions of love, chivalry and honour.

To the squeamish the third act will ever appear offensive, but those who have rightly understood the author will see it in a different light. The last *tête-à-tête* with the Duchess was the purgatory of Lord Quex; that he came out of it unscathed was proof of his regeneration.

The name of the gay Lord Quex forms the title of the play—and a very attractive one it is. But it would be wrong to infer therefrom that Quex is the leading character, the real centre of interest. He has certainly much to say; he is the hero and the moraliser (the *raisonneur* of Dumas II.), but after all we are not so much interested in the man, who belongs to the familiar type of old beaux, which we have met before in literature, yet never so inelegantly dressed as Mr. Hare presented him. His livercoloured suit, with its strange and ugly triangular flaps, his red tie, white spats and shiny boots—to say nothing of an anointed wave of hair right above the forehead, were a libel on the smartly-groomed squires of dames, whom one may encounter in the West of London. Really, Lord Quex should redecorate his Lordship, for now, except for Mr. Hare's excellent acting, there is nothing to warrant the indiscretion of the Duchess.

We do not mind so much what Quex is or does: two other characters among a crowd, every member of which has its little

individuality, rivet our attention. The Duchess, to wit, and the manicurist, Miss Fullgarney. Both are creatures of great originality. The Duchess is the first great "amoureuse" in our own modern repertoire who has been drawn with a realistic pencil. We have been shown that kind of woman before—in "The Tyranny of Tears," for instance—but always dulcified, always white-washed for the sake of an unsophisticated audience. Here the woman is represented as she really is—as she has been portrayed by Georges de Porto-Riche and by Donnay, respectively in "Amoureuse" and in "Georgette Lemeunier." It was a bold stroke of Mr. Pinero to introduce the woman whose flesh is weak and whose blood is hot into the English drama, and he has done it with a masterly hand. The manners of the Duchess are perfect, and no one could have displayed them with more grace than Miss Fortescue, although she is far too cold an actress to render the palpitations of the character; the Duchess' morals are like the yellow-covered French novels, to which she refers, by no means irreproachable, but distinguished by "style." In fine, she is a live woman, not of those who deserve our love, but who are much coveted and belong to that particular coterie of the aristocracy, which constantly flits "autour du divorce."

Miss Fullgarney, on the other hand, is altogether a "brick." From the first we knew what to expect from her, a girl of scant education, but somewhat polished in her graduation from the area, and latterly in her constant friction with good society. Yet it wants very little rubbing to get at the ground-colour. Hence her occasional slips into the language of Cockneydom, her ungraceful adjustment of her garters, her eaves-dropping, her romantic infatuation for the semi-gentlemanlike palmist, and her excessive vehemence and impulsiveness in her desire to sever Quex from his fiancée. But otherwise what a delightful creature! what an infinite fund of friendship for her foster-sister (that relationship is somewhat hazy and remains unexplained), what wealth of woman's wit and cunning, and finally, when she has recognised that Quex is better than his repute, how touching are her attempts at reparation! Her

methods may not be those of a lady; for to coax Quex into trouble, and anon to inveigle the captain into a "liaison", as soon as his honeymoon over, is not in good form. But it is perfectly consistent with the character. It is thus that in the lower walks of life a woman might act to attain the end of what is to her a holy cause.

Miss Irene Vanbrugh vivified every shade of this most complex personality with so much subtlety and so much delicate intensity that one may well unite her name to that of the author as the main shareholder in the success.

About the cleverness of the play in its details I would fain fill a column. But this might spoil the interest of those readers who have not yet succeeded in obtaining access to the overcrowded theatre. The *mise-en-scène* is a marvel of dexterity, and in every scene, in the sketch of every character there is evidence of immense familiarity with the optics of the stage, and, what is more important, with the habits and conceits of our fellow creatures. Mr. Pinero, highly endowed as he is, possesses particularly the gift of characterising men and women by their trifling peculiarities—things which appear to be of no importance, which, however, contain a revelation of the inner man. Thus, in spite of the length of the cast, every character has an individuality of its own, not elaborately explained, but firmly moulded in a couple of lines, or in a marginal direction as to attire, manners, and actions.

"The Gay Lord Quex" is indeed the work of a master craftsman; but it is far more than that. It is a work that gains the closer and the oftener it is inspected. Its satire and its pathos alike are stimulating, and cannot but evoke animated discussion. There is truth, there is life, there is brain-power in it and with these only can our drama be rescued from decay.

"THE KING'S OUTCAST"

April 30. '99.

Verdict: A fairly strong, wholesome, romantic play by a young writer who understands the business of the stage, and promises to make his mark in the future. As matters stand now, Mr. Mackay must strive for freedom. He suffers from too much *métier* and too little originality, like most actors who begin to write plays. It is not poverty of thought—certainly not in the case of Mr. Mackay—which drives them into the trap of convention. It is their too great intimacy with plays in which they have acted.

From this it will be gathered that there is not much that is fresh or original in "The King's Outcast," although the old material has been so skilfully handled that one would fain compare the young author's dexterity with the nimble fingers of women, who with a ribbon here and a ruche there know how to turn an old frock into a new one.

All the elements of the romantic school are gathered here. The convict father, an ex-forgery, who escapes from prison to see his son once more, the son who is a chip of the old block, and freely attempts to exercise his *droit du seigneur* upon the inn-keeper's daughter, wooed by the village blacksmith—as honest a soul as ever trod the boards of melodrama. The convict father is the means of saving the girl from dishonour, and his son from disgrace, at the very moment when he is proving the law of heredity by his efforts to obtain the signature of his intoxicated friend to a bill of exchange. Then

the soldiers come and shoot the escaped convict. He dies in the son's arms, while the little innkeeper's daughter is harmoniously linked to the blacksmith. Of course, these are mere points to show as it were the landmarks of the big scenes of the play. Some are very telling indeed, and would bear a favourable comparison with the best Adelphi situations. But I class this work a good bit above ordinary melodrama, for it is not bombastic, it is throughout somewhat distinguished in tone, and at least two characters, the convict and the smith, are neatly drawn.

The audience seemed to appreciate the play, and called the author no less than three times. There was a little exaggeration in this enthusiasm, but a good deal of it was well deserved by the author, and particularly by the actors. Mr. Charles Cartwright was very forcible as the convict. His mask was the broad-arrow man to the life, and his fiery ebullitions of passion moved the spectators deeply. Mr. Cartwright is an actor who has little control of his undeniable powers and lays on his colour so thickly that all subtlety of characterisation vanishes. Miss Sydney Fairbrother—ever condemned as it seems to play boys, which is scarcely defensible from an artistic point of view—played with much delicacy and feeling. Her silent acting above all is remarkable, for her features are ever alive with emotion, and her eyes are as eloquent as her lips. An excellent performance was the smith of Mr. Charles Rock. Here is an actor who deserves attention. He is highly conscientious, and ever makes his parts, even the smallest, tell. In these characters of a bluff and rough mould, such as old soldiers, sailors, workmen, &c., he is at his best. His fine voice is rich in sincerity, and he never hunts after effects. Yet he strikes home, which proves that he is an artist of some distinction. Mr. Gerald Gurney chose the ungrateful part of the squire, and had moments when he was forcible in his delivery; but nervousness hampered him a good deal, so it would be unfair to judge his powers after a first performance, which was for him full of heavy responsibilities. Lastly I should like to pay a tribute to Miss Edith Ostlere, a

very clever actress with a sympathetic voice and a winning manner. Sometimes she is given to strike attitudes, which are somewhat affected, and she mars her efforts by wanting to do too much. Yet her Marjory was a creditable performance, and should pave Miss Ostlere's way to a successful career in central London, where she is already well known as the authoress of an interesting book on the Seven Dials.

"CHANGE ALLEY"

April 30. '99.

Could you behind the curtain cast your eyes
You'd see a sight would summon ready sighs,
There our poor authors, mournful and forlorn,
Shake in their shoes and wish they'd ne'er been born.

I quite understand the feeling of the authors, although they might have spared themselves their shoeshaking acrobatics and us their whining prologue for mercy. It would have been even better to have spared us the play, which probably would never have been produced but for the paragraphic mendacity of those newsmongers who describe a mild frost in New York as a spring-like success, and thereby entice managers into costly speculations. "Change Alley" was in New York what should be called a "succès d'indulgence"; yet we have read for months and months about Messrs. Parker and Carson's "beautiful" play. Wherefore our expectations ran high, and dropped like so many logs when we discovered that the beautiful play was sorry stuff, and narcotic in the extreme.

It is no pleasure to have to say this in unison with my colleagues. I had hoped to be able to praise at last a work by Mr. Parker and his collaborator, after having felt in duty bound to condemn in rapid succession three works from Mr. Parker's pen—"The Termagant," "The Jest," and "The Mayflower"—for, by some, continuous censure may be considered as prejudice. But, literally bubbling over with the milk of human kindness before the curtain rose, I soon realised that there was

no help against its turning, for once more the play was a dire failure, and at the end the patient but avenging gods signified their disapproval in no equivocal sounds. The truth is that Messrs. Parker and Carson go too lightly to work. Their fertility is as bewildering as it is distressing.

Why are the Parker-Carson plays of such ephemeral vitality? Simply because they lack stomach and thought. When these writers have found a suitable atmosphere—a canvas of old Italy, old England, old Wardour-street, and what not, they conceive a little story—of no importance—model a few puppets of no particular ingenuity, and then they busy themselves with details. Details of costumes, of scenery, of furniture, of horticulture, and lots of other things that pertain to culture. And sometimes they succeed, like conjurers, in bamboozling the public, but mostly the cheap and tinselled stuff goes back to the lumber-room never to appear again.

Lest I should be unfair to these much-tried authors, I have gone carefully through the book of "Change Alley," which was presented to the critics on the first night, and its perusal has neither modified my opinion nor rendered the story more intelligible. "Change Alley" is all cry and no wool, it is an amazing chaos of noise and bluster, interrupted here and there by fine speeches, which refused to be managed by the actor's tongues, so fine were they, so high falutin.

All this is the result of over-production, over-pressure, and finnikin craftsmanship. There is undoubtedly a fine drama to be written round the South Sea Bubble and its disastrous consequences, but the authors have not attempted to do it. They affix to their story of the spendthrift n'er-do-well, whose fame and future are saved by the woman he loves—a very new theme indeed, all sorts of quaint labels with historical designs. But the drawings are blurred and clumsy, like the fanciful pictures of the Lord Mayor's Show, which on November 9 are sold by gutter-merchants for a penny. And the worst of it is that Messrs. Parker and Carson's failures are always pretentious and expensive. The whole histrionic paraphernalia is pressed into service to clothe their anæmic creations; but drape a

skeleton as sumptuously as you like, where there's no flesh, no life, and no features, the costumier and the perruquier and the decorator are all powerless.

So are the actors. Give them a story, characters and dialogue full of meaning to handle, and they will mould it into something akin to life. But mere ejaculatory phrases and fine and futile words remain, even upon the lips of the most accomplished artist, like the sounds of the rattle—much ado about nothing. Under these circumstances Mr. Fred Terry, Miss Neilson, Mr. Welch, Mrs. Waller could do nothing with their parts, and Mr. Loraine, who seems to consider shouting and rushing about the chief components of dramatic art, overshot the mark so frequently that he was ludicrous to behold. Mr. Murray Carson alone succeeded in making some impression as the old salt, "Hundred and One." There was something weird and forcible in his performance, but the character itself was as impossible as the rest. I have heard it said that "Change Alley," if it be not a good acting-play, is at least, in parts, good literature. This is news—satisfactory news—to me. But it would be as well if for the present Messrs. Parker and Carson would kindly stoop to build good plays first and make them literature afterwards. It may cost them a little more time and trouble, but it will reward them better in the end, both in coin and reputation.

"IN DAYS OF OLD"

April 30. '99.

I condole with Mr. Rose. He is another victim of the craze. London wants pictorial plays—nearly every theatre except the Criterion and the Globe has them—and London must be satisfied. So Mr. Rose wrote "In Days of Old," a story of the Wars of the Roses, and, alas! he fell into a shrub of thorns. His entanglement was a severe one; he had got in—he had to get out—and he did. But how I do not know, nor did anyone at the St. James', nor did the author, who, after his heroic feat, had to face the uncomplimentary jeers of the crowd.

The fact was that Mr. Rose saw a very fine story in his mind's eye with a fine part for Mr. Alexander and, of course, Miss Davis. There was going to be heroism and battling, as in ancient days, when Britons were never so happy as when there was a little row. On paper it looked very bold and brave, and I can imagine that the author, when he read his prose to Mr. Alexander, was fascinated by the grace and the force of his own language. Some of it survived the performance, although Mr. Alexander, a clever actor but by no means a tragedian, and Miss Fay Davis, who has not the faintest conception of the acting powers required by a romantic drama of historical foundation, were both unable to master their difficult parts.

But on the whole "In Days of Old," when it came to be tested on the stage was mere leather and prunella and incomprehensible into the bargain. I don't profess to tell plots of plays in detail, but I own freely that in this case I could not do

so if I would, although a fortune were to be gained by it. It was all so noisy, so confused, such a clatter of arms and such an endless cable of explanations, that people looked at one another as if to ask: "Do you know what it all means? I don't." And, mind you, this was not Maeterlinck or Ibsen, but good, honest Rose, made in these isles, and no vile importation from Scandinavia or Belgium.

Of course, something was clear: That Armyn Beddart (Mr. Alexander) fell in love with Lilan (Miss Davis), that there was unpleasantness in the Beddart family, and that wicked cousin. Ulick (Mr. H. B. Irving) longed to part these two, in which he succeeded for a while. Then all parties tumbled—it is the right word—into the Court of the weak-minded King Henry VI and Queen Margaret of Anjou (Miss Violet Vanbrugh), who had an accent à la Marguerite Cornille, which was funny. The Queen was very friendly with the young couple, talked to them as if there were no such a thing as a protocol or etiquette, and did her best to make them happy ever after. However, owing to Ulick's wickedness, that was no easy task, for Lilian had kissed somebody to whom she was officially betrothed, and Ulick had taken good care that Armyn should be an eye witness of this osculation. Well, things grew very unpleasant; somehow the roses began to show their thorns, there was a fight royal, and just when Lilian was to be married to her erstwhile wooer, Mr. George Alexander, like the immortal Phineas Fogg, appeared on the scene and said "Voilà." That was a great shock to all concerned, but nevertheless the marriage was celebrated, if not consummated, for Mr. Rose in his mercy killed the newly-made husband in good time, and then, at last—it was nearly 11.45 p.m.—love was triumphant.

Not a bad idea, is it? And it might have been stirring if it had been told in straightforward, concise manner. It was also a beautiful spectacle, for the scene-painter and the designer of the dresses, Mr. Macquoid, R.I., had between them reconstructed the days of old as truthfully as the limitations of the stage would allow. But the author somehow had not put on his colours sufficiently strong to render the picture vivid, and the

actors, with the exception of Mr. H. V. Esmond, as Ulick, had great difficulties in adapting themselves to the period of the sixth Henry. Miss Violet Vanbrugh was entirely modern as the Queen, her French accent was very comical, and the game of fast and loose she played with it did not contribute to the dignity of the character. Miss Esmé Beringer was, perhaps, the best representative of the days when gowns were flowing and the headgear was peaked. She played with much charm, and, if she had not been forced to appear constantly in double harness with Miss Julie Opp, whose acting was devoid of all subtlety, she would have carried the part into prominence.

The fate of "In Days of Old" will be to die in its teens, for it is neither a good play nor one that is well acted. Yet it is one of those disappointments which may serve a useful purpose. Mr. Edward Rose will, no doubt, henceforth fight shy of pseudo-historical dramas, and Mr. George Alexander will return to his old love which has been so faithful to him—the play of modern life.



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